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THE FORMATION OF A PROSPERITY THEOLOGY THAT
TAKES FULL ACCOUNT OF AN 'IDEAL' CONSIDERED
HERMENEUTICAL STRATEGY IN THE LIGHT OF THE
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE
HERMENEUTICS OF WORD-FAITH AND NON-WORD-
FAITH PROSPERITY TEACHING

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Supervised at London School of Theology

October 2016

Abstract

Michael Vincent

The formation of a prosperity theology that takes full account of an 'ideal' considered hermeneutical strategy in the light of the strengths and weaknesses of the hermeneutics of Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teaching.

PhD - Middlesex University/London School of Theology - 2016

The question addressed by this thesis is the extent to which prosperity teaching, both Word-faith and non-Word-faith, may be regarded as legitimate in its interpretation of Scripture, regarded by all concerned as the final authority on matters of faith and doctrine. This thesis will derive a considered 'ideal' or complete hermeneutical strategy based on the teaching of well-respected hermeneutics scholars, which will be used to evaluate the interpretation of Scripture by all parties to this prosperity debate. These include Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers, as well as those critical of Word-faith prosperity teaching, and a group of commentators on their teaching, providing the scholarly context to this thesis.

Works highly critical of Word-faith prosperity teaching have been produced between 1979 and 1992, asserting that such prosperity teaching is not legitimate scriptural teaching. So this thesis will evaluate the hermeneutics of prosperity teachers, their critics and the commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching, using the 'ideal' hermeneutical strategy derived in this thesis.

This thesis therefore begins with an analysis of the pioneers and forerunners of prosperity teaching from the nineteenth and early twentieth century who demonstrate that prosperity teaching has some early roots, adding a degree of legitimacy to prosperity teaching. Then, the interpretation of all parties to the prosperity debate is evaluated using the considered hermeneutical strategy derived, supported by the views of contemporary commentators on the scriptures consulted. In the light of this evaluation legitimate prosperity themes are identified and analysed to formulate a categorised prosperity theology having three categories of righteousness, wisdom and faith as they apply to the prosperity of the believer. The categorised prosperity theology thus derived will also provide a prosperity classification which believers of all persuasions should be able to assess their position on biblical prosperity and thereby find prosperity advice applicable to them.

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Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Caroline, for her energy and focus in reading the various drafts of each chapter as they were formed.

Michael Vincent

October 2016

Style Features

Scripture	Written with a capital S when referring to the whole Bible.
scripture	Lower case s when referring to a particular verse or passage.
he /his	Lower case when referring to God as with Authorized Version usage.

A Distinction

Commentators	<p>This term is used in two different senses in this thesis.</p> <p>‘Commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching’ refers to those carrying out a scholarly evaluation of Word-faith prosperity teaching.</p> <p>‘Contemporary commentators of Scripture’ refers to scholars who have produced independent interpretation of the books of the Bible.</p>
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Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction and Definitions

1.1	Introduction.	1
1.2.	Statement of Aims.	1
1.3.	Basic Research Question.	2
1.4.	Scholarly Context	2
1.5.	Background Issues	3
1.6.	Belief Systems of Possible Influence on Word-Faith Prosperity Teaching	7
1.7.	Concluding Remarks	15

Chapter 2 – Prosperity Debate and Debaters

2.1.	Introduction	17
2.2.	Pioneers of the Evangelical Awakening	18
2.3.	Forerunners of the Word-Faith Prosperity Movement	23
2.4.	Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers and their Teaching	27
2.5.	Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers and their Teaching	31
2.6.	Critics of Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers	34
2.7.	Scholarly Context	36
2.8.	Sympathetic Supporters	42
2.9.	Concluding Remarks	43

Chapter 3 - Hermeneutical Strategy

3.1.	Introduction.	45
3.2.	The Scripture Principle	46
3.3.	The Author's Intention	48
3.4.	Selection of Texts	53
3.5.	Use of Translations	55
3.6.	Genre and Historical Context	57
3.7.	Use of OT in the NT and in Contemporary Christianity	58
3.8.	The Role of the Holy Spirit	62
3.9.	Concluding Remarks	70

Chapter 4: Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers

4.1.	Introduction	74
4.2.	Word-faith Prosperity Teachers	75
4.3.	Overall Conclusion to Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers	110

Chapter 5 – Development of a Three Category Prosperity Theology

5.1.	Introduction	114
5.2.	Prosperity Themes from Word-Faith Prosperity Teaching	115
5.3.	Formulation of a Three Category Prosperity Theology from Prosperity Themes	151
5.4.	Concluding Remarks	157

Chapter 6 - Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers

6.1.	Introduction	159
6.2.	The Distinctive Teachings of Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers	159
6.3.	Hermeneutical Evaluation of Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Themes	175
6.4.	Concluding Remarks	191

Chapter 7 - Critics and Commentators of Word-Faith Prosperity Teaching

7.1.	Introduction	195
7.2.	The Views of the Critics and Commentators	196
7.3.	Hermeneutical Analysis of Themes from the Critics and Commentators	218
7.4.	Concluding Remarks	232

Chapter 8: A Categorised Approach to Prosperity Teaching

8.1.	Introduction	234
8.2.	Hermeneutical Issues	234
8.3.	Theological Issues	246
8.4.	Final Assessment of the Thesis	250
8.5.	Final Conclusion	259

<u>Bibliography</u>	262
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Chapter 1 - Introduction and Definitions

1.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the subject of the thesis and summarises the methodology for the research. The statement of aims, forming §1.2., describes the research as an investigation into prosperity teaching as an expression of genuine Christianity. It introduces the hermeneutical strategy for exploring the validity of the interpretation of Scripture by all parties to the prosperity debate. The basic research question is explained in §1.3., whilst the scholarly context is described in §1.4., reviewing the status of research by independent scholars into general Word-faith theology. Background issues, considered in §1.5., are the role of hermeneutics in this thesis together with a consideration of prosperity teaching among pioneers and forerunners. Chapter 1 concludes in §1.6., with a study of belief systems considered by some to be influential in the development of the prosperity message. The groups of debaters over prosperity teaching are introduced in chapter 2 together with their arguments and representative speakers. These include Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers, their critics and scholarly commentators as well as a select group of sympathetic supporters.

1.2. Statement of Aims

The purpose of the research is to assess the hermeneutical justification for Christian prosperity teaching and for Word-faith prosperity teaching in particular. This involves an analysis of Word-faith teaching and an evaluation of numerous works critical of the Word-faith movement, assessing the hermeneutics behind their arguments while seeking to extract a measured scriptural basis for their perspectives from the often heated polemic of some of their authors. This study will also consider more recent scholarly studies for their perspective on this debate. At issue will be an assessment of the hermeneutical strategy upon which both Word-faith and non-Word-faith teaching is based as well as that used by those opposed to it. As a result, this thesis will seek to form a prosperity theology that takes full account of an idealised hermeneutical strategy derived as part of this thesis. Although it would be valuable to investigate uses for wealth received by Christians, this must remain outside the scope of this thesis. However, this thesis will suggest that financial prosperity would equip believers individually and corporately to relieve suffering, rather than for self-indulgence as claimed by the critics. Prosperity teaching is a contentious area within

worldwide Christianity and would benefit from serious investigation. Consequently, this hermeneutical evaluation of prosperity teaching constitutes an important area of original research as presented in this thesis.

1.3. Basic Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to consider the following basic research questions.

Firstly, *'What are the strengths and weaknesses of the hermeneutics of the prosperity teachers considered, both Word-faith and non-Word-faith?'* For this evaluation an

'ideal' considered hermeneutical strategy is developed in chapter 3. Secondly, *'What would a prosperity teaching that takes full account of this 'ideal' considered*

hermeneutical strategy comprise?' In this aspect of the study, a three category

prosperity approach is developed through the research of chapters 5-7. The research to be presented seeks clear scriptural confirmation through the pioneers and forerunners for a prosperity teaching that Christians might reasonably adopt teaching that God will bless them financially, if they adopt certain principles, including generosity and wisdom in their giving, as well as the exercise of faith. Furthermore, this research will demonstrate that the pursuit of poverty as a means of piety is misguided, despite the contrary views of many believers who oppose such acquisition of wealth.

1.4. Scholarly Context

A complete analysis of the major contributors to the prosperity debate will be found in §2.4-8, but this section examines the status of research into the Word-faith movement.

It has been the subject of several important research projects in recent years, which form the context of this thesis. A recent publication (2012), edited by Attanasi and

Yong, investigating Pentecostalism and prosperity from a phenomenological

perspective, will be evaluated.¹ The next most recent research is by Atkinson (2009)

who investigates the Word-faith teaching on the spiritual death of Jesus.² Prior to this

King (2008) produced his in-depth analysis of Word-faith theology, including a brief but valuable assessment of faith and prosperity.³ These last two works are different

from this project but provide much valuable background material. Harrison (2005)

produced his research based entirely on a survey of financial prosperity, in one largely

¹ Katharine Attanasi, and Amos Yong (eds.), *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

² William P Atkinson, *The 'Spiritual Death' of Jesus: A Pentecostal Investigation* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, NV, 2009).

³ Paul L King, *Only Believe: Examining the Origin and Development of Classic and Contemporary Word of Faith Theologies* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2008).

African American Word-faith church.⁴ Collecting evidence from multiple testimonies, he presents evidence on prosperity teaching among members of this church. Another important work, sponsored by the Evangelical Alliance, is by Perriman (2003), who reports on the Word-faith movement.⁵ He compares mainstream evangelicalism with ‘the prosperity gospel’. Bowman’s work (2001) is on the Word-faith controversy questioning the acquisition of wealth through ‘positive confession’ (the verbal declaration of scriptures supporting desired outcomes).⁶ He advocates a return to a ‘rich, mature, biblically sound Pentecostalism’, an expression previous generations of evangelicals would perhaps have found difficult to accept. Much earlier, Kinnebrew (1988) wrote his unpublished D.Th. dissertation on positive confession.⁷ He offers a critique on the hermeneutics of this practice. Accordingly, there is clearly an opportunity for an original work investigating the hermeneutical bases of Word-faith prosperity teaching, which also addresses the concerns of those critical of it and considers the theological conclusions which may be drawn (see §8.3. for theological observations).

1.5. Background Issues

1.5.1. Introduction

This section compiles the various features forming the context of this thesis, firstly identifying the various pioneers of the nineteenth century who seemingly first addressed the question of provision from God, for ministry but also for personal needs. Thereafter, a group referred to as ‘forerunners’ primarily of the early twentieth century began to form something of a prosperity gospel (see §1.5.2.) The writings of these two groups of ministers, make it possible to form in §1.5.3 a preliminary definition of prosperity as presented by prosperity teachers. Finally, this section indicates the role hermeneutics will play in determining the validity of the views of debaters on this subject (see §1.5.4.). Since all accept the authority of Scripture for matters of faith and doctrine, it remains only to discover what would be a legitimate hermeneutical strategy for the interpretation of scriptures concerned (see chapter 3) and the extent to which various debaters adopt it.

⁴ Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in African American Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005).

⁵ Andrew Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003).

⁶ Robert M Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001).

⁷ James M Kinnebrew, *The Charismatic Doctrine of Positive Confession: A Historical, Exegetical, and Theological Critique* (Unpublished Th.D. thesis, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988).

1.5.2. Pioneers and Forerunners

The period of history following the end of the 18th century marks the era of the ‘pioneers’ and ‘forerunners’. The ‘pioneers’, mainly from the 19th century whose prosperity teaching is considered, are George Müller, C.T. Studd, Charles Spurgeon and Amy Carmichael whose perspectives will be analysed in §2.2. This will then lead into an analysis of ‘forerunners’ of the Word-faith prosperity teaching, from the period leading into the 20th century. A. B. Simpson and A.J. Gordon were also associated with the Higher Life and Faith Cure movements introduced in §1.6.3. E.W. Kenyon, Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schüller, and Oral Roberts were also forerunners of Word-faith prosperity teaching. Their work is analysed in more detail in §2.3., forming a basis from which Word-faith prosperity themes may be traced.

1.5.3. A Preliminary Definition of Prosperity

This topic is introduced with regard to a number of faith workers referred to as ‘pioneers’ of prosperity teaching. The ‘classic faith’ view, a term invented by King, referring to the pioneers of faith, was that prosperity would ‘supply for all needs for oneself and for accomplishing God’s work’.⁸ King notes among the pioneers, Taylor, Spurgeon, and Carmichael practised living by faith for financial provision for their ministries.⁹ Müller regarded wealth as the ability to alleviate the difficulties faced by the poor.¹⁰ Wealth, therefore, was money for ministry, received without appealing to any human agency.¹¹ Avoiding debts was also a form of prosperity strongly advocated by Müller and Studd.¹²

Spurgeon regarded prosperity as the result of one’s generosity involving active trust in God’s provision.¹³ Carmichael also valued generosity and receiving from God.¹⁴ However, these pioneers set their needs very low, where some ‘luxuries’ might have made them more effective in their ministry. Carmichael acknowledged some dangerous aspects of financial prosperity for those who would not deal with it with

⁸ King, *Only Believe*, 323.

⁹ King, *Only Believe*, 324.

¹⁰ Müller, George, *The Autobiography of George Müller* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985) 111-2.

¹¹ Basil Miller, *George Müller: Man of Faith and Miracles* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, n.d. [1941]) 158.

¹² King, *Only Believe*, 329.

¹³ Charles H. Spurgeon, *An All Round Ministry* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965 [1900]) 3, 16; Charles Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning for Graduates* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011 [1866]) 300.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Elliott, *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1987) 227.

caution.¹⁵ This distrust of financial abundance was perhaps caused by attitudes of Christians regarding poverty as virtuous despite the apostle Paul's assurance of 'sufficiency in all things and an abundance for every good work' (2 Cor 9:8). The pioneers have attempted to challenge these poverty assumptions, showing from Scripture and by their example that money is not evil of itself.

The definition of prosperity is further developed from the forerunners, Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers. Of the forerunners, Peale and Schüller defined prosperity as the improvement of the quality of life by faith through possibility thinking and dreaming, but not for improper indulgence but for the avoidance of unnecessary suffering.¹⁶ Simpson and Hannah Whitall Smith also defined wealth as that which produced a 'larger' or a 'happy life'.¹⁷

There followed the emergence of a group of prosperity teachers known as 'Word-faith' prosperity teachers, referring to a group of closely associated teachers with links particularly with Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland, who emphasize the verbal declaration of Scripture as an aid to faith for personal improvement and blessing. With them, the prosperity issue became a matter of the believer's authority where, by faith, they could apparently command a greater level of provision simply by declaring positive statements based on Scripture. There is also a group of teachers referred to as 'non-Word-faith' teachers, who are not closely associated with each other or with the Word-faith prosperity teachers. For non-Word-faith teachers, increased prosperity is more the result of 'renewing the mind' (Rom 12:2), whereby a person's attitude to money is altered from personal gain towards its being available for the provision for others. The works of non-Word-faith prosperity teachers also first appeared much later than those of Word-faith teachers, most appearing in the early 21st century.

Copeland further defines prosperity as 'the ability to use God's power to meet the needs of mankind in any realm of life'.¹⁸ Gloria Copeland (his wife) claims that prosperity also includes healing, protection, favour, wisdom, success, and spiritual and

¹⁵ Amy Carmichael, *You Are My Hiding Place* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1991) 44.

¹⁶ Norman Vincent Peale, *The Positive Way to Change Your Life* (London: Vermilion, 1998 [1982]) 54-5; Robert H. Schüller, *Move Ahead with Possibility Thinking* (New York, NY: Jove Books, 1978 [1967]) 48, 55.

¹⁷ A.B. Simpson, *Life More Abundantly* (New York, NY: Bibliolife, 2011 [c.1912]) 38-45; Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books, 1968 [1875]) 13-27.

¹⁸ Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974) 22.

mental well-being,¹⁹ in keeping with other prosperity teachers' understanding of the prosperous soul of 3 John 2.²⁰ Steven Scott, a non-Word-faith prosperity teacher, also concludes that riches mean material and spiritual wealth.²¹ He perceives prosperity as the ability to turn dreams into reality, producing success and happiness.²²

Conclusion - The essential element in the definition of prosperity put forward is that the lust for money is to be avoided, so believers can become a channel of finance to others and to have a generous sufficiency for themselves. This implies having financial resources beyond one's legitimate needs and holding them available to be directed wherever God may lead. This may cause believers to have a reasonable expectation of being further prospered by God for further acts of generosity. This research will also seek to establish a theological basis for prosperity as a blessing from God. The opinion of Amos Yong and Frank Macchia will be consulted in chapter 8 to support the conclusions drawn regarding the theology of prosperity teaching (see §8.3.).

1.5.4. The Role of Hermeneutics

The aim of this study referred to in §1.2., the 'Statement of Aims', is to assess the hermeneutical methods adopted by all parties to this debate enabling an evaluation of their thinking. The hermeneutical assessment will be a central issue, because those concerned claim to base their divergent opinions on Scripture. The whole of chapter 3 is devoted to the important task of developing a considered hermeneutical strategy for this thesis representing an 'ideal' approach to the interpretation of the scriptures under review. This is based on the hermeneutics texts of Grant Osborne, Anthony Thiselton, Kevin Vanhoozer and Howard Marshall as well as those by Amos Yong and Clark Pinnock & Barry Callen to add their perspective on the role of the Spirit in interpreting Scripture.²³ Issues to be considered are the Scripture principle, the author's intent and

¹⁹ Gloria Copeland, *True Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 2004) 5-6.

²⁰ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 23; Stephen K. De Silva, *Money and the Prosperous Soul: Tipping the Scales of Favor and Blessing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2010) 25-8.

²¹ Steven K. Scott, *The Richest Man Who Ever Lived* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2006,) 230-2.

²² Scott, *Richest Man*, 29-49, 95-103.

²³ Grant, R Osborne, *The Hermeneutic Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006 [1991]); Anthony C Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London: HarperCollins, 1992); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998); I. Howard Marshall, 'Introduction' in I. Howard Marshall, (ed.), *New Testament Interpretation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997 [1977]); Clark H. Pinnock and Barry L Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006 [1984]); Amos

its significance, the selection of texts, the use of translations, genre and the interpretation of Old Testament (OT) scriptures from insights gained from the New Testament (NT). The role of the Spirit in interpretation will also be considered.

1.5.5. Conclusion to Background Issues

The topics presented in this section introduce the parameters by which contributions to the prosperity debate may be assessed. There was a growing awareness in the nineteenth century and beyond that financial and material prosperity may be a legitimate pursuit for believers and this was apparently taught by the pioneers and forerunners of Word-faith prosperity teaching. From these writings a preliminary definition of legitimate wealth and prosperity for the believer was formulated which provides a measure from which prosperity teaching may be investigated. This section, finally, presented the basis upon which the teaching of all parties to the debate may be assessed, by drawing attention to a considered hermeneutical strategy devised in this thesis to evaluate the interpretations of Scripture. The introductions forming this chapter continue by considering the various belief systems alleged by some to have given rise to Word-faith prosperity teaching.

1.6. Belief Systems with Possible Influence on Word-faith Prosperity Theology

1.6.1. Introduction

Much of the debate surrounding Word-faith theology relates to its possible perceived roots in the metaphysical teaching of New Thought and Christian Science which emerged in the late 19th century. The appeal of these two movements was that they offered apparent supernatural intervention in the problems of life. However, they had a sub-biblical theological base. It will become apparent that there are significant similarities between some aspects of Word-faith teaching and New Thought regarding the use of visualisation and positive declaration to produce improvement in personal success and prosperity. However, it will also become apparent that there are also fundamental differences between their two approaches, primarily with regard to the nature of their theological beliefs and also concerning genuine fellowship with God, as will become apparent in this section. New Thought and Christian Science are not to be confused with two orthodox Christian movements of the same era; Faith Cure, promoting miraculous healing and Higher Life focussing on personal improvement.

Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006 [2002]).

These four movements are summarised here providing the background necessary for this study.

1.6.2. New Thought and Christian Science

Introduction – New Thought and Christian Science adopt similar methods for self-improvement as for health. However, since this thesis deals only with prosperity issues, Christian Science is only of interest as an associated movement for receiving by faith, but not apparently faith in God as taught by Christian orthodoxy.

Background - New Thought is a metaphysical approach to self-improvement and health which is also known as Mind Cure, Mental Healing, Mind Science, or Harmonialism.²⁴ This approach is also known as the power of positive thinking. Simmons has described the difficulty of defining New Thought because of its diverse nature.²⁵ It is a loose association of groups which formed the international New Thought alliance of 1914 including several quasi Christian groups.²⁶ New Thought is also described as a means of improving one's personal success including one's personal prosperity and is thought to be responsible for the promoting the success mentality in American thinking.²⁷ This involves human elevation and the development of spiritual and mental techniques for the transformation of physical reality. The self-betterment described here clearly includes financial improvement and prosperity but this system is clearly based on humanity's essential goodness, contrary to Christian teaching and apparently involves no fellowship or relationship with God.

Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-66) was the founder of New Thought and was a mental healer achieved through teaching healthy attitudes to personal prosperity and well-being. He was instrumental in recording some of the principle New Thought doctrines.²⁸ Ralph Waldo Trine (1866-1958) taught that people have untapped powers, which if used would give more control over their thoughts and accomplishments.²⁹ Thus they would expect positive attitudes to produce positive outcomes regarding prosperity. Johnnie Colemon (1920-2014) was well known as the

²⁴ Horatio, W. Dresser, *Hand Book of The New Thought* (New York, NY: The Knickerbocker Press, 1917) 3; Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 6.

²⁵ Dale H. Simmons, *E.W. Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power, and Plenty* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1997), 80.

²⁶ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 67.

²⁷ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 67, 76.

²⁸ Atkinson, *Death of Jesus*, 16; Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 67.

²⁹ Ralph W. Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite* (London: Bell & Hyman Limited, 1986 [1899]) 17-19; Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 145-7.

originator of the Universal Foundation for Better Living, an alliance of black New Thought metaphysical congregations, an association of New Thought organisations with African American membership. She was a forerunner of contemporary American Faith leaders.³⁰ Horatio W. Dresser (1866-1954) was the author of a handbook of New Thought and spoke against the abject submission of the soul to God. He suggested self-realisation in place of self-effacement, holding the view that natural laws rule our experience,³¹ and implied that God is not involved in the natural world. H. Emilie Cady (1848-1941) held the view that being godly did not necessitate deprivation. She affirmed that God is 'Supply' and grants what we dare to claim, affirming that unselfishness was vital and that abundance for ministry could be received.³² It appears that Cady was more evangelical than many other New Thought writers, for she reasonably accurately described people as heirs of God, quoting Romans 8:17, and thereby heirs of his wisdom, love and strength, so that they would be free from errors and fears and also legitimately free from lack.³³ However, she could have been clearer on distinguishing between believers and the human race in general.

Summary of New Thought Doctrines – Dresser summarised New Thought in his 1917 publication:

The New Thought stands for the affirmative attitude. It affirms success even among failure. It stands for the power of mind. It makes for the elimination of fear, anxiety, worry, nervousness, excitement, depression, pessimism, unbelief. It is a vigorous gospel of health and healing. ... it fosters belief in the immediate, immanent presence of the Father-Spirit.³⁴

The success mentioned would once again imply financial success, so that New Thought does have a prosperity message.

Quimby's New Thought Doctrines included:

God as father and creator; man as spiritual and independent of matter; the visible world as an outward projection of inward activity; spiritual matter is responsive to thought; disease is the result of false reasoning; health is due to knowledge of the truth; Jesus came to declare the truth; rejection of sin, grace, atonement.³⁵

³⁰ Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 134-135.

³¹ Dresser, *New Thought*, 16-18.

³² Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 47, 217.

³³ H. Emilie Cady, *Lessons in Truth: A Course of Twelve Lessons in Practical Christianity* (Lee's Summit, MO: Unity School of Christianity, 1953 [1894]) 132.

³⁴ Dresser, *New Thought*, iii.

³⁵ Phineas P. Quimby, *Father of New Thought*, accessed from <http://phineasquimby.wwwhubs.com> on 15.01.12, 1-2, citing page 2; Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 47.

Trine quoted Rudolf Eucken as describing New Thought as ‘...not a “call to the cross,” but a call to a far more valuable and useful thing – a call to the *life* and *the teachings* of Jesus.’³⁶ Furthermore, he regarded the fall of humans as completely disproved. He regarded it as a negative and degrading influence and a belief that damaged one’s well-being.³⁷ There is therefore a misguided trust in human goodness and abilities consistent with their denial of the fall.

Prosperity and Success – Trine describes the New Thought view of prosperity that maintaining thoughts of poverty will increase the likelihood of being poor, whilst if one maintains thoughts of prosperity, whatever one’s present position may be, unspecified forces are set in motion that will in due course bring that person into prosperity. He describes this as the law of attraction continually at work in the universe and that faith is a key to its working.³⁸ Trine therefore concluded that because of this law of prosperity one must look for better things to come, for he asserted that ideas have occult powers and that they are seeds for the activation of material results.³⁹ His advice, then, was to see oneself as prosperous whilst also believing that before long you will be prosperous. For he declared that expectancy becomes a magnet to attract the thing desired.⁴⁰ New Thought, then, may have had some desirable goals and some strategies that sounded remarkably like Word-faith teaching. But New Thought is clearly distinct in that Trine refers to the involvement of occult forces and also because it is not consistent with primary Christian doctrines.

Conclusion - New Thought has a number of objectives Word-faith teachers may also espouse, including the concept that believers should be initiators rather than being passive. Also New Thought belief in seeking success, self-improvement, health and provision are also goals akin to Word-faith teaching. However, although offering apparently miraculous self-improvement, the price is the denial of doctrines central to orthodox Christianity, including the immanence of God, his day-to-day support for the believer, a denial of original sin, the fall and the reality of the material world. The rejection of these beliefs renders New Thought deviant and not therefore a belief system Word-faith or non-Word-faith teachers would accept. The same must be said

³⁶ Ralph W. Trine, *The New Alignment of Life* (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1914), 14, quotes and italics in the original.

³⁷ Trine, *Alignment of Life*, 92-3.

³⁸ Trine, *In Tune*, 157.

³⁹ Trine, *In Tune*, 161.

⁴⁰ Trine, *In Tune*, 162.

of Christian Science with its denial of the material realm which Scripture clearly teaches as created by God as a dwelling place for humanity.

1.6.3. Higher Christian Life (Higher Life) and Faith Cure

Background and Origins - Higher Christian Life is the name given to a development in orthodox Christianity of the late 19th Century, which Simmons saw as attractive to those fleeing legalism in pursuit of an interior life of the Spirit.⁴¹ He saw Higher Life as having given refreshment to those who were hungry for the Spirit rather than obedience to the law.⁴² As an immanentist movement in the UK and the US, it was centred on the Keswick Holiness movement.⁴³ Smith referred to Higher Life as ‘this life of faith’, regarding it as a life of growing in grace, and reaching spiritual maturity.⁴⁴ The Higher Life movement had numerous leaders including A B Simpson, A J Gordon and Andrew Murray all of whom maintained a close friendship with Spurgeon and D L Moody.⁴⁵ The important aspect of this movement was that, in addition to personal holiness, it taught seeking God for material needs and through the supernatural one could rise above one’s circumstances.⁴⁶ The related healing movement was known as Faith Cure, whose inclusion here is justified by the fact that just as faith for financial improvement was part of the Higher Life teaching, so faith for healing was the basis of the Faith Cure movement. Quoting Simmons, Faith-Cure focussed on Isaiah’s messianic prophecy, also recorded in Matthew 8:16-17, which declared ‘Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ...’.⁴⁷ The conclusion drawn was that healing was therefore part of the atonement, which meant that sickness and disease were part of the curse, broken in Christ. Cullis’ view was that ‘Christians are not living up to their gospel privileges’, when failing to acquire the promised blessings of bodily healing.⁴⁸

Beliefs - Leaders of this movement taught a second work of grace by which sin is subdued or eradicated as taught by D L Moody. This second work of grace also known as the doctrine of subsequence refers to a further experience of the Holy

⁴¹ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 91.

⁴² Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 89.

⁴³ Atkinson, *Death of Jesus*, 15.

⁴⁴ Smith, *A Happy Life*, 121.

⁴⁵ King, *Only Believe*, 44-5, 51.

⁴⁶ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 86; Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 60.

⁴⁷ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 225.

⁴⁸ Charles Cullis, *Faith Cures or Answers to Prayer in the Healing of the Sick* (Boston, MA: Willard Tract Repository, 2015 [1895]) 5.

Spirit.⁴⁹ As Smith testified, this involves surrender which she believed sent steam to the engine. However there were different emphases with Keswick Holiness emphasising the power and the Wesleyan Holiness emphasising the purity of the works of the Holy Spirit. And these branches of the movement popularised the concept of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in these ways.⁵⁰

Other aspects of Higher Life beliefs include the importance of faith as a fundamental principle to be expressed in the present tense implying activity now, even though some time may elapse before the manifestation of such faith.⁵¹ Higher Life also involved speaking out one's faith, through positive confession.⁵² Simmons regards positive confession as originating from E W Kenyon, which is considered to be his most enduring legacy.⁵³

Higher Life teachers were reluctant to teach on improved financial prosperity of the believer, preferring to place the emphasis on prosperity and success for ministry.⁵⁴ However, Simpson acknowledged that there was no harm in money for house and land so long as these things were not valued in themselves.⁵⁵ Moreover, King quotes Cullis who declared living by faith for temporal things to be a lost art.⁵⁶ Smith regarded the full provision of a father for his children as a model for God's care for believers, who would not want them impoverished.⁵⁷ However, she cautioned that the will of God was the most valuable and precious possession, 'better and sweeter' than money or prosperity.⁵⁸ These sentiments are in keeping with Müller's views as a pioneer of the prosperity message, who was opposed to prosperity for oneself if its purpose was ease and luxury instead of for assisting the poor.⁵⁹ Therefore there is definite restraint among Higher Life teachers in seeking wealth for personal needs, but it is regarded as an acceptable practice if it is to be a greater blessing to Christian ministry.

⁴⁹ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 152; King, *Only Believe*, 238.

⁵⁰ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, xiv, xv, 87; Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 59.

⁵¹ King, *Only Believe*, 25; Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 158.

⁵² Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 60; King, *Only Believe*, 255.

⁵³ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 303.

⁵⁴ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 234.

⁵⁵ A.B. Simpson, *Days of Heaven on Earth* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1984 [1897]) October 6th.

⁵⁶ King, *Only Believe*, 323.

⁵⁷ Smith, *A Happy Life*, 32.

⁵⁸ Smith, *A Happy Life*, 36.

⁵⁹ Roger Steer, *Spiritual Secrets of George Müller* (Robeson, PA: OMF Books, 1985) 87, based on his journals.

Bowman offers advice on how such financial blessings may be acquired, observing that Higher Life called upon believers to yield to Christ's indwelling life, for it was believed that one could depend on Christ for one's needs, including material needs.⁶⁰ Among the pioneers, provision for personal needs was kept very low, but gradually the realisation came that the higher life sought by this movement ought to include more generous provision for oneself. In this connection, Spurgeon's biographer described his attitude when travelling first class by train as being 'to save the Lord's servant'.⁶¹ Simpson also referred to the heavenly bank when declaring that God's reliable promises must be endorsed by faith and presented at this heavenly bank.⁶² Spurgeon, whom King quotes, affirmed that the promises of God are appropriated by faith.⁶³

Among the forerunners of prosperity teaching, also generally involved with the Higher Life movement, it appears to have been Spurgeon who had the greatest influence upon them in terms of the message of personal prosperity. For example, King observes that Roberts 'seed-faith' had its origins in Spurgeon's teaching.⁶⁴ Andrew Murray saw the importance of believers ruling their circumstances, including their personal finances when he declared that God is seeking kings from among the fallen human race to rule his universe.⁶⁵ The prosperity message of Higher Life, then, is that there is far more that God has provided for his followers than many have appropriated.

Conclusion - The essential element of Higher Life not present in New Thought or Christian Science was faith, meaning faith in an immanent, caring God. It also stresses the sanctifying and empowering work of the Spirit, with whom believers were taught to fellowship. Thus, believers received divine provision for personal holiness, material needs and health. This is based on orthodox theology enhanced with holiness doctrines and the belief in a personal Holy Spirit. There was also an emphasis on positive confession for expressing one's faith, and similar beliefs to Higher Life appear to be the basis for much Word-faith prosperity teaching.

⁶⁰ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 60.

⁶¹ Lewis Drummand, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992) 280.

⁶² A.B. Simpson, *In the School of Faith* (New York, NY: Christian Alliance Publishing Co., [1894]) 270.

⁶³ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Faith's Chequebook* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, n.d.) ii; King, *Only Believe*, 133.

⁶⁴ King, *Only Believe*, 61.

⁶⁵ Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1981 [1885]) 142.

Simmons' concluding remarks summarise the aspirations of those pursuing Higher Life. He records R. Kelso Carter's words that their main purpose is to "possess the land' to the uttermost, and to glorify God most by simply taking the place and every place he assigned to [them]."⁶⁶ The extremes to which some adherents may have gone may be due to observing too many lives satisfied only with the unexceptional. Accordingly, the growth of this movement can partially be ascribed to the new awareness of the miraculous and of God's evident presence as experienced by followers of the movement.⁶⁷ The Faith Cure movement, as the healing counterpart to Higher Life, practised healing by faith and relied entirely on God for the successful outcome, setting an example for exercising faith for financial sufficiency and prosperity. The implication, then, is that poverty and lack are also part of the curse as portrayed in Deuteronomy 28:38-46, which have also been broken in Christ.

1.6.4. Conclusion to Belief Systems

Although superficial similarities have been observed between New Thought and Word-faith teaching, a more in-depth analysis reveals that the former involves a denial of fundamental Christian doctrines which the latter adheres to. Therefore, the criticisms about Kenyon and possible influence by New Thought, possibly involving a metaphysical cult with psychic powers, appear to be unfounded, especially since he repeatedly denounced New Thought. The examination of Christian Science reveals similar distortions of Scripture, whilst rejecting a similar set of core Christian values including most importantly the reality of sin and the need for a saviour, as well as belief in the materiality of the human body.

The important distinct component of Higher Life was faith, specifically in the God of the Bible together with the sanctifying and empowering work of the Spirit. Higher Life also encouraged the verbal declaration of Scripture to express such faith. This movement additionally engendered a new expectancy for the miraculous. The background of Higher Life and Faith Cure shows that many of the principles of Word-faith teaching and practices have their origins in the healing ministry of pioneers such as Simpson and Gordon. Even in his day Gordon had to defend his ministry against critics who were either cessationist or accused him of adopting principles of the metaphysical cults. DeArteaga observes that he skilfully and effectively steered a middle course between the two extremes and effectively demonstrated faith cures that

⁶⁶ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 304, quoting R. Kelso Carter (1897) quotation marks original.

⁶⁷ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 304.

were significant and miraculous.⁶⁸ The Faith Cure movement grew because of a widespread dissatisfaction with the restrictive Calvinism of the previous two centuries or more, and because Faith-Cure represented a view of God as immanent and who responded to the faith of the individual. Although sovereign, God would still appear willing to accommodate the initiatives of believers who by faith are seeking the present implementation of his promises. This principle is the subject now being investigated with regard to financial prosperity. As DeArteaga claims, there were and are those opposed to such teaching in every generation, whom he describes as pharisaical, so this thesis seeks to evaluate the critics' position regarding prosperity teaching (see §7.2.2.).

1.7. Concluding Remarks

In response to the research question regarding the legitimacy of the hermeneutics of Word-faith prosperity teaching, the aims for this research include the analysis and evaluation of this and other prosperity teaching in terms of the principles of biblical interpretation adopted, together with claims of its critics and scholarly commentators on their teaching. Accordingly, this chapter introduces seven key research projects studying various aspects of Word-faith teaching from Kinnebrew's 1988 dissertation on positive confession to Attanasi and Yong's 2012 volume on *Pentecostalism and Prosperity*.

This chapter also analysed background issues forming the parameters for the assessment of prosperity teaching. It notes its pioneers and forerunners, deriving from them a working definition for prosperity based on the financial provision for others as well as sufficiency for the believer. The essential role of hermeneutics was therefore introduced as a means of evaluating the interpretation of Scripture by all concerned.

The parties to this debate are also introduced in this chapter, and include the Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers as well as the critics and the commentators forming the scholarly context of this thesis (see §1.4.), all of whom will be analysed and evaluated in subsequent chapters of this thesis. Finally, two pairs of belief systems with possible influence on the prosperity teachers have been analysed. New Thought and Christian Science are identified as significantly deviant from core Christian values, whereas Higher Life and Faith Cure, though different in emphasis

⁶⁸ William DeArteaga, *Quenching The Spirit: Discover the REAL Spirit Behind the Charismatic Controversy* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1996 [1992]) 119.

from traditional Christian teaching appear consistent with its core values and teaching. Both Higher Life and Faith Cure appeal for the miraculous in the life of the believer, and it is from them that a number of significant forerunners arise.

Further chapters of this study will compare and contrast various forms of advocacy and responses from both scholarly and popular authors, based on the legitimacy of the interpretation of Scripture by all concerned. Chapter 2 further analyses the pioneers and forerunners of the prosperity debate, together with an introduction to all prosperity teachers, their critics and the scholarly commentators of their works. Thereafter, chapter 3 will formulate the considered hermeneutical strategy for the evaluation of the interpretation of all concerned. This prepares the way, therefore, for the assessment of the teaching of all parties to the debate in chapters 4-7.

Chapter 2 – Prosperity Debate and Debaters

2.1. Introduction

Chapter 1 stated the aims of this thesis and reviewed the basic research questions and scholarly context for this research, as well as introducing background issues such as the role of hermeneutics in this thesis. It also analysed belief systems of possible influence in the formation of Word-faith prosperity teaching. Now in chapter 2 the various debaters are presented together with the pioneers and forerunners of this prosperity teaching and the views of each group are introduced and analysed. Primary reference is made to Word-faith and to a distinct group known as non-Word-faith prosperity teachers as introduced in §2.5., together with the critics and the scholarly commentators of their teaching.

Accordingly, §2.2. introduces four historical pioneers of faith for finance from the evangelical awakening of the nineteenth century, revealing how their faith was applied. Thereafter, §2.3. describes the writings of forerunners, primarily of the twentieth century, who focussed on the application of faith for improving the quality of life as opposed to providing funds exclusively for ministry. Thus, they teach a positive attitude as an expression of faith and its perceived influence on increasing the level of provision for the believer.

The pioneers and forerunners provide the basis for the introduction to a close-knit group of associates known as Word-faith prosperity teachers who are analysed in §2.4. Their teaching began to emerge in the 1960's through Hagin and Roberts, from whom it developed more widely until the present. All such teachers believed and taught that financial prosperity was a legitimate pursuit for believers, through faith. Four such teachers were investigated, and they are Kenneth E. Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, John Avanzini and Jerry Savelle. They are presented here and studied in depth in chapters 4 & 5. This choice was made because these four teachers represent the full range of such prosperity teaching, enabling its research with sufficient depth. However, the teaching of other Word-faith prosperity teachers omitted for in-depth study do appear occasionally in support of their teachings on their more distinctive topics. These include Gloria Copeland and Oral Roberts. §2.5. presents non-Word-faith prosperity teachers whose views were arrived at independently having no close relational association either with each other or with Word-faith prosperity teachers. Their teachings will add a different dimension to the theology of wealth and possessions.

Works critical of Word-faith prosperity teaching are analysed in §2.6., most of which began to emerge from 1979 onwards. Their criticisms, often polemic, refer to prosperity teaching as a deception, a distortion of the cross and as erroneous doctrine. The writings of two of those studied are presented and analysed here to be evaluated hermeneutically in chapter 7. This choice was made because the writings of the two chosen covered most aspects of the critics' work and enable a more complete analysis and evaluation of their views. The opinions of a range of neutral observers are analysed in §2.7., whose works were written primarily post 2000 and which provide the scholarly context for this thesis as recorded in §1.4. They critique Word-faith teaching in general and their assessment of Word-faith prosperity teaching is considered here and in chapter 7.

The final group of writers reviewed in §2.8. is a select group of scholars broadly supportive of Word-faith prosperity teaching. They affirm the value of such prosperity teaching whilst in some cases also acknowledging its perceived weaknesses and inappropriate extremes. Of these, just one, William DeArteaga, is considered for further study.

2.2. Pioneers of the Evangelical Awakening

2.2.1. Introduction

Four pioneers of the nineteenth century are chosen as central and significant figures in the application of faith for divine provision in one or more context, including the provision of finance both for personal and for ministry needs. Their primary concern was for financial provision for ministry, with minimal financial provision for their own needs. However, their ministries were very significant and in some cases huge sums of money were required and received for their work. William Kay refers to the historical link between Christian spirituality and poverty, which explains the tensions within Pentecostalism between sacrifice and prosperity, the implication being that believers must choose one option or the other.¹ This section will therefore investigate whether the two alternatives are indeed mutually exclusive or whether, rather, prosperity may provide greater opportunities to make sacrifices. This principle may be examined in the context of the pioneers of prosperity teaching. This, then, marks the point of growing awareness for divine provision.

¹ William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism in Britain* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000) 327, 338.

2.2.2. George Müller (1805-1898)

Müller's was an early example of receiving donations for his ministry. His diary from 1830 to 1860 shows his concern for the poor and for alleviating their difficulties through faith, endurance and the sacrificial giving of Christians.² His focus was not the prosperity of believers, but on the use of finance to assist the poor and needy, so he founded numerous orphan houses and schools. Pierson, his biographer, emphasized the importance for Müller of understanding God's will so that funding from God may be assured.³ There were also repeated challenges through ill health and over-work for both Mr & Mrs Müller. Müller's account revealed the huge sums of money raised by this ministry without asking for donations.⁴ The message was one of faith, prayer and endurance.

Cullis and Kenyon were among those who followed his 'faith principles', believing a salary to be unnecessary.⁵ Perriman regards him as a forerunner of the modern faith movement, in finance, but not for divine healing.⁶ Simmons and Bowman note Müller's influence on the forerunners of the Word-faith movement⁷ and observe that Müller was impressed by the teaching of the pietist, Francke, which encouraged him to begin his 'faith work'.⁸ King analyses Müller's attitude to faith, noting its passive trust in the Lord and its active aspects involving action when God's will was known, so influential on Hudson Taylor.⁹

Müller's attitude to Scripture is evident in that the principles upon which his ministry was founded were all based on Scripture, including opposition to debt and his refusal to make appeals other than to God.¹⁰ There is no evidence of declaring Scripture in his ministry, nor any emphasis on the believer's authority in matters of faith. There is little teaching on major themes running through Scripture but more on reading large amounts of Scripture to apply to his immediate situation and for themes for his sermons.¹¹ He tended to 'enter minutely' into the meaning of a single verse as well as

² Müller, *Autobiography*, 59-61.

³ Arthur T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1965 [1899]) 380.

⁴ Müller, *Müller: Man of Faith*, 158.

⁵ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 60, 71.

⁶ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 259.

⁷ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 57, 61; Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 304.

⁸ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 18-19.

⁹ King, *Only Believe*, 104.

¹⁰ Müller, *Autobiography*, 59-61.

¹¹ Müller, *Autobiography*, 32.

giving main points to its general understanding.¹²

2.2.3. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Spurgeon became the minister of the new Metropolitan Tabernacle, and his success led to the opening of his pastors' college.¹³ Faith was a frequent topic of his preaching, as opposed to self-effort.¹⁴ Drummond noted Spurgeon's life of faith following the practice of Müller, Taylor, Carmichael and Simpson, but Spurgeon allowed a little luxury for the wellbeing of 'God's servant'.¹⁵ Spurgeon revealed an attitude to finance more associated with the Word-faith prosperity teachers, acknowledging that 'the most generous Christians of his acquaintance have been ... almost invariably the most prosperous'.¹⁶ This conclusion is drawn from Haggai 1:9 and applied to believers of his day with little apparent reference to its historical context, but reasonably applied to an equivalent context involving contributions to Christian ministry. King regards Spurgeon as one of the earliest faith teachers associating giving with financial prosperity. Indeed, Roberts' well known catch phrases appeared to come directly from Spurgeon, such as 'give to gain' and 'faith's way of gaining is giving'.¹⁷ Spurgeon suggested that believers should expect as much prosperity as is good for them as a gracious reward for liberality.¹⁸ He further added that happiness is not having full barns, but knowing the Lord.¹⁹ Also, he foresaw that too much wealth may make the believer unwieldy, producing worldliness.²⁰ Spurgeon was passionately committed to the guidance of Scripture over the principles for his ministry. He selected his texts widely from Scripture using both OT and NT with an apparently similar unsophisticated hermeneutic.²¹ Spurgeon drew upon the typological example of Hagar and Sarah in Galatians 4:25-31. He supports this with reference to Paul's interpretation of this allegory by confirming that those in Christ are Abraham's offspring (Gal 3:16, 29).²² He identified Abraham as a role-model of faith,

¹² Müller, *Autobiography*, 33.

¹³ Lavinia Cohn-Sherbock, *Who's Who in Christianity* (London: Routledge, 1998) 278.

¹⁴ Spurgeon, *All Round Ministry*, 1.

¹⁵ Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 280; King, *Only Believe*, 324-5.

¹⁶ Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning*, 300.

¹⁷ King, *Only Believe*, 329.

¹⁸ Spurgeon, *Faith's Chequebook*, 5.

¹⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Triumph of Faith in the Believer's Life* (Lynnwood, WA: Emerald Books, 1994) 83.

²⁰ Spurgeon, *Faith's Chequebook*, 5.

²¹ Spurgeon, *Triumph of Faith*, 27-38. This one chapter quotes Lamentations, Psalms and Isaiah with numerous NT scriptures, displaying a preference for the writings of John.

²² Spurgeon, *All Round Ministry*, 2.

since believers, as heirs of Abraham, should by faith overcome difficulties and produce success.²³ There are also examples where Spurgeon notes how the NT interprets the OT giving as he said, ‘a variation in translation’ with different shades of meaning.²⁴ The repetition of Scripture was therefore significant for him suggesting a range of meaning or application in the OT reference. Accordingly, he felt it appropriate on occasion to teach on in-depth studies of individual verses.²⁵

2.2.4. C T Studd (1860-1931)

The ‘famous cricket player’ gave away all his fortune and launched faith missions.²⁶ As such he must be regarded as a pioneer of Christian financial teaching and practice. Studd felt the impact of Christ’s words to the rich young ruler (e.g. Matt 19:16-22) causing him to dispose of his inherited fortune at age 25.²⁷ The inheritance of £29,000 (valued at multiplied millions of pounds today) was distributed to those involved in Christian ministry including Müller, Moody, Taylor and Booth.²⁸ According to Grubb, Studd regarded the hundredfold return promised by God as the surest thing on earth.²⁹ Yet the evidence of the hundredfold return is not apparent in the life of Studd, for Eileen Vincent notes that this loss of all financial reserves led to painful and embarrassing financial pressures on his family, even though CT and Priscilla were both committed to giving their wealth.³⁰ The principle of the *rich young ruler* from Luke 18:18-23, so important to Studd, is also taught by Kenneth Copeland and Savelle from Matthew 6:20 and 19:21(see §4.2.3. & 5.). Studd, like Müller, also avoided debts of all kinds.³¹ Studd’s disposal of his fortune perhaps reflects the influence of Hannah Whitall Smith who convinced him that the secret of the blessed interior life required abandonment and absolute faith.³² These events in Studd’s life show his commitment to follow Scripture as the one guiding principle for life. His practice was to read the Bible at length with prayer for guidance. Thus he relied upon the Holy Spirit to bring appropriate verses to his attention.³³

²³ Spurgeon, *All Round Ministry*, 3, 16.

²⁴ Spurgeon, *Triumph of Faith*, 15.

²⁵ Spurgeon, *Triumph of Faith*, 53, 68-9.

²⁶ King, *Only Believe*, 45.

²⁷ Norman Grubb, *C.T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960, [1933]) 64-5.

²⁸ Grubb, *C.T. Studd*, 66.

²⁹ Grubb, *C.T. Studd*, 65.

³⁰ Eileen Vincent, *C T Studd and Priscilla: United to Fight for Jesus* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications Ltd., 1988) 138. (The author acknowledges Eileen Vincent as his sister-in-law).

³¹ King, *Only Believe*, 329.

³² E. Vincent, *CT and Priscilla*, 41.

³³ Grubb, *C.T. Studd*, 35, 78.

2.2.5. Amy Carmichael (1867-1951)

Carmichael was influenced by Taylor's faith principles on trusting God for all one's needs. As a result she experienced miraculous provision, deliverances and healings.³⁴ As a follower of the Keswick holiness movement, she taught on receiving fresh 'words' from God in keeping with her *Logos* and *Rhema* teaching and the distinction between the general revelation of Scripture and the reception of more personal application of specific scriptures to the individual. Elliott recorded that Carmichael came to believe in the power of God as in Mark 16:17, for healing, deliverance, miraculous provision and protection, and prophetic words, dreams and visions.³⁵ She practised living by faith, and kept a simple lifestyle with no extravagance.³⁶ Exceptions were allowed for travel and for building expenses.³⁷ Elliott believed she saw no promise for debt cancellation and that one should not make one's needs known unless asked.³⁸ However, she expected that the generous donor may expect God's supply from what remains, as exemplified in the feeding of the 5000, taken to be a promise of provision over and above one's daily supplies.³⁹ Carmichael also believed that prosperity involved willingness to let all possessions go, while not being attracted to the world's delights.⁴⁰ Also she advised that the believer's desires can become less pressing as they look to God.⁴¹ However, if a desire were God-given it would apparently intensify upon seeking God.

Carmichael's use of Scripture was somewhat unsystematic and her teaching followed no general theological themes, rather giving the impression of those scriptures which from daily devotions came to be an encouragement to her. Her works display relatively infrequent references to Scripture, and with an apparent preference for the OT. Her concept of divine provision was set quite low and offered sincere thanks to God for even modest provision during the trials of her missionary work. On one occasion she quoted Psalm 36:8 that 'They shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of Thy house...' yet drew no prosperity theme from that text.⁴²

³⁴ King, *Only Believe*, 45.

³⁵ Elliott, *Amy Carmichael*, 89-90, 99, 168, 181 and 292-3; King, *Only Believe*, 74.

³⁶ Elliott, *Amy Carmichael*, 98.

³⁷ Elliott, *Amy Carmichael*, 98, 208.

³⁸ King, *Only Believe*, 329-30; Elliott, *Amy Carmichael*, 227.

³⁹ Elliott, *Amy Carmichael*, 227.

⁴⁰ Carmichael, *Hiding Place*, 44; King, *Only Believe*, 326.

⁴¹ Amy Carmichael, *Thou Givest... They Gather* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1958 [1933]) 110; King, *Only Believe*, 327.

⁴² Amy Carmichael, *Rose from Brier* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1973 [1933])

2.2.6. Conclusion to the Pioneers of the Evangelical Awakening

In summary, this section shows that each of these pioneers had different emphases and different expectations. Regarding their attitude to Scripture, indications are that they had a profound trust in and reliance upon Scripture for doctrine as well as guidance. While Pentecostals/charismatics place the emphasis on being led by the Spirit, the pioneers looked to the scriptures relying upon God to bring guiding texts to their attention. Prosperity teaching was clearly not a major preoccupation for these pioneers and so no overall prosperity doctrine is apparent. But individual scriptures are used to confidently point to generosity, selflessness and expectation of divine provision albeit at a modest level.

2.3. Forerunners of the Word-Faith Movement

2.3.1. Introduction

This section introduces teachers from the latter nineteenth to early twentieth centuries who explored possible areas of Christian self-improvement. Their teaching describes positive expectation for a successful life using faith to overcome personal difficulties. These teachers cultivated an expectation of healing and happiness, but not always for personal prosperity. This is because the pioneers introduced focussed primarily on finance for their ministries and not for personal financial improvement or other personal blessings. The emphasis of the forerunners is different because they were teaching on faith for a higher level of blessing and although finance was not a particular focus it was certainly one of their concerns. Roberts appears here as a forerunner but in §4.1. he is introduced as one influential with Word-faith prosperity teachers, and is therefore involved with the two groups of teachers. Several 20th century teachers introduced self-improvement by the application of faith for prosperity. Sarles traced the emergence of the prosperity gospel from the positive thinking emphasis of Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schüller, blended with the faith-healing ministry of Oral Roberts.⁴³

2.3.2. E.W. Kenyon (1867-1948)

Kenyon is quoted as an influential figure for Hagin, but he virtually never discussed wealth, so would only be a forerunner of Word-faith teaching in general. Atkinson surveys Kenyon's theological background with its distinctive ideas about faith and the

⁴³ Ken L. Sarles, 'Prosperity and Healing: Is it Promised to the Believer?' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 No.572, (Oct-Dec 1986), 329-350, citing 329-30.

need to vocalise it.⁴⁴ Also, he notes Kenyon's concept of human authority regained through redemption. Kinnebrew's work explored positive confession but did not regard Kenyon as its originator.⁴⁵ Simmons traced Kenyon's roots more to Keswick than to New Thought, noting that there was little application to financial prosperity.⁴⁶ McIntyre sees Kenyon more as a follower of Müller's style of trust for financial needs where his associates were inclined to look for more natural sources of remuneration.⁴⁷

2.3.4. Norman Vincent Peale (1898 –1993)

Peale's teaching presented practical and workable techniques for living a successful life.⁴⁸ He described engaging the mind so that one's expectations were positive. His teaching was based on selected scriptures reminding his readers that all things are possible to those who believe (Mark 9:23). He advocated the powerful effect of changing one's way of thinking, as a way of expressing faith so that positive outcomes of success and prosperity are achieved.⁴⁹ He quoted extensive examples from contemporary role models to demonstrate such positive effects. Peale also described speaking from such a positive mind-set as a means of 'removing mountains' (Mark 11:23).⁵⁰ Financial wealth may not have been the central focus of such teaching, but it is clearly part of the success and prosperity described and his principles of trust and positive expectation were relevant.

Peale's use of Scripture reflects his purpose in producing works described typically as 'practical ... personal-improvement' manuals.⁵¹ The style was to major on personal anecdotes and conversations with potential roles models interspersed with brief widely spaced Scripture references. He nonetheless shows great respect for Scripture, quoting from both OT and NT. The scriptures were presented to suggest *techniques* to prevent defeat in some areas of personal life. Each reference appeared to be used at face value and of direct application to the contemporary believer, with little reference to author's intent or to the genre of the scripture in question. He showed a marked preference for the gospels with fewer references to the writings of the apostle Paul. His advice

⁴⁴ Atkinson, *Death of Jesus*, 9.

⁴⁵ Kinnebrew, *Positive Confession*, 131-5.

⁴⁶ Simmons, *Pursuit of Plenty*, 233, 304.

⁴⁷ Joe McIntyre, *E.W. Kenyon and his Message of Faith: The True Story* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1997) 126.

⁴⁸ Norman V. Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (London: Cedar, 1987, [1953]) 302.

⁴⁹ Vincent Peale, *Positive Thinking*, 114.

⁵⁰ Vincent Peale, *Positive Thinking*, 135.

⁵¹ Vincent Peale, *Positive Thinking*, viii.

included trusting in God and resting in his provision, but few if any texts referred to the work of the Spirit either in the believer's life or in interpreting Scripture.

2.3.5. Robert H. Schüller (1926-2015)

Schüller, Peale's associate, similarly contrasted possibility thinkers with those who regard challenges as impossible.⁵² He suggested that transformed thinking opens up new possibilities, advising that financial insufficiency should not prevent pursuing one's dreams. Accordingly, he advocated borrowing money for this purpose.⁵³ His teaching was to use faith to move mountains.⁵⁴ Schüller's later works broadly reiterated this positive mental attitude teaching.⁵⁵ He did not focus upon money directly, but taught on changing one's mind-set so that difficult tasks were regarded as possible, even where the finance is was not available, enabling one to dream and to succeed in life.⁵⁶ Thus, he regarded nothing as being impossible when approached with positive thinking.⁵⁷

Schüller appeared to have a somewhat sporadic application of Scripture in his teaching, whereby scriptures were quoted fairly infrequently, whilst the sayings of wise people and scholars appeared to have a more prominent place in his works. However, there appeared to be something of a balance between OT and NT scriptures. For example, he quotes OT prophets, Psalms and Proverbs as well as referring to the gospels and letters.⁵⁸ His hermeneutical strategy would have to be regarded as somewhat superficial, demonstrating few of the aspects to be derived in Chapter 3.

2.3.6. Oral Roberts (1918-2009)

Although recognized as a prosperity teacher, Roberts is also regarded as a forerunner of Word-faith prosperity teaching. In his 1957 work he described the role of faith in moving God to perform miracles, to overcome life's storms.⁵⁹ His teaching offered the antidote to fear of poverty and sickness.⁶⁰ When discouraged, he advocated having

⁵² Schüller, *Possibility Thinking*, 13-36.

⁵³ Schüller, *Possibility Thinking*, 101-6.

⁵⁴ Schüller, *Possibility Thinking*, 187-90.

⁵⁵ Typical of these are Robert H. Schüller, *Tough Minded Faith for Tender Hearted People* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990, [1983]); *Success is Never Ending; Failure is Never Final* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990, [1988]).

⁵⁶ Schüller, *Possibility Thinking*, 48, 55; *Success Never Ending*, 21, 27.

⁵⁷ Schüller, *Success Never Ending*, 67.

⁵⁸ Schüller, *Tough Minded Faith*, 306-366.

⁵⁹ Oral Roberts, *Faith Against Life's Storms* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, 1957)

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⁶⁰ Roberts, *Faith Against Storms*, 13, 27, 30.

a little more faith, this being the extent of the faith message at that time.⁶¹ With his 1970 publication, and the launch of Oral Roberts University, his financial message was then well formed.⁶² His *seed-faith* teaching described three key principles for receiving God's financial blessing which were to be committed to God as one's only source of finance, to give that it may be given to you and to expect a miracle. His seed-faith emphasis means that he is not entirely representative of the Word-faith movement despite being an influential figure for that movement.

Roberts' use of Scripture was much more direct than the other forerunners, showing evidence of a unified prosperity theology by 1975. He clearly implied that Scripture was the only guiding principle for him and although he introduced anecdotal examples illustrating his points, they followed the clear teaching of Scripture. He chose NT scriptures mostly from the gospels with Paul's writings quoted to a lesser extent. As mentioned, Roberts gave attention to quoting scriptures whilst describing their historical and cultural context, so that their application was not inappropriate. It appears that Roberts based his teaching appropriately on Scripture, using a moderate number of texts but reliably establishing biblical principles from them.

2.3.7. Conclusion to the Forerunners

The pioneers investigated in §2.2 demonstrated the application of faith to finance their ministries, whilst downplaying their personal financial needs. The forerunners, however, changed the emphasis from ministry needs to the raising of the quality and prosperity of the individual believer's experience, so that their teaching was of universal relevance. The application of faith for financial provision then emerged as a direct result of this teaching in the mid twentieth century. Sarles also saw the faith healing of Roberts and the positive thinking dimension of Peale and üller as laying the foundation for the emerging prosperity gospel. The important principle for them was that faith was stimulated by Scripture, and the faith thus developed was considered influential in moving God to perform miracles for the believer, including financial miracles. However, although Kenyon is introduced here as an influential figure, particularly with Hagin, he never became a significant prosperity teacher. So, he remains an influential forerunner in general but not one whose works are examined in this thesis.

⁶¹ Roberts, *Faith Against Storms*, 41.

⁶² Oral Roberts, *The Miracle of Seed-Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, Inc., 2004 [1970]).

Clearly, the forerunners had a trust and regard for Scripture, but tended to use it in different ways. Peale used Scripture to support anecdotes describing role models, but each appeared to be taken at face value with little regard for context or genre. Schüller's use of Scripture was similar but with a decided preference for OT texts to support the testimony of exemplary believers. Roberts on the other hand placed relevant scriptures first and derived his prosperity teachings from them, choosing texts from the NT primarily with the gospels most often chosen. However, he gave more attention to historical context. The prosperity message from the forerunners is, in general, based on a somewhat superficial hermeneutic and so the evaluation of Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teaching will consider whether their hermeneutics are more reliable and comprehensive than the forerunners.

2.4. Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers and Their Teaching

2.4.1. Introduction

This section examines the basis of prosperity teaching by referring to four characteristic members of the close-knit community of Word-faith teachers. The group of teachers they represent is a community associated relationally with Hagin and Kenneth Copeland as the two central figures of this movement. The four representative teachers are Hagin, the father figure with Kenneth Copeland, his follower, then Savelle as Kenneth Copeland's one-time disciple and Avanzini, another important and influential Word-faith prosperity teacher. These four are also selected for in depth study in chapter 4, but occasional references in that chapter will also be made to Roberts, who although characterised as a *seed-faith* teacher is the other influential teacher in Kenneth Copeland's life. Gloria Copeland is also quoted occasionally presenting a distinctive view on some aspects of the teaching.⁶³ Members of this group of teachers developed their prosperity doctrine from the 1970's onwards, in part as a result of the influence of certain pioneers and forerunners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see §§1.5.2. & 2.2-3). The scriptural basis of the prosperity teaching presented, firstly traces OT themes from Eden to Malachi and NT discourses range from the parable of the sower through to John's letter to Gaius. Such teaching was brought forth in the belief that it represented the

⁶³ Gloria Copeland is the wife of Kenneth Copeland, so references to these two teachers in this thesis will usually quote forename and family name. There are other significant Word-faith prosperity teachers to whom reference might have been made, including Creflo Dollar, but they are not regarded as sufficiently divergent to warrant research in their own right.

teaching of Scripture, in contrast to the affinity for poverty which had its roots largely from sources outside of Scripture. The introduction, here, to these teachers will be necessarily brief since the hermeneutical evaluation of their teaching will form the basis of chapters 4 and 5. The literature produced by these four Word-faith prosperity teachers is reviewed in chronological order of their first published work on the subject, which also indicates the order in which these teachers were influenced by one another.

2.4.2. Kenneth E Hagin (1917–2003)

Hagin's Word-faith prosperity teaching arose as he made the connection between faith and prosperity in 1953. In 1966 his first book on finances was released, tracing redemption from poverty based on Galatians 3:13-14 and 29 declaring the curse broken in Christ and the blessing promised to Abraham made available to NT believers.⁶⁴ Contrary to much teaching of the pioneers and forerunners of the faith movement, Hagin taught that believers should take the initiative in receiving from God.⁶⁵

It is important to note that Hagin believed that Jesus has done all he is ever going to do to defeat poverty.⁶⁶ He came to this conclusion following a perceived personal encounter with God, and suggested that everything required to enforce the believer's victory had been won on the cross. This victory was therefore to be enforced by declaring God's word over situations, as guided by the Spirit.⁶⁷ Consequently, he believed it was 'a waste of time' to pray to God for victory.⁶⁸

2.4.3. Kenneth Copeland (b. 1937)

Texan born Kenneth Copeland is widely seen as the disciple of Hagin, and is said to preach the same message.⁶⁹ Copeland was saved in 1962, but he and his wife had an impoverished lifestyle, with serious debts.⁷⁰ He has written three substantial books between 1974 and 2011, with numerous other pamphlets on single issues, many to do with prosperity.

⁶⁴ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness and Spiritual Death* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Inc., 2003 [1966]) 1-22 ; Kenneth Hagin, Jr., 'The Hard Years', in Kenneth Hagin Jr. (ed.) *Fifty Years in the Ministry* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1984) 58.

⁶⁵ Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Believer's Authority* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 2002 [1967]) 11-14, 21, 24, 39.

⁶⁶ Kenneth E. Hagin, *How to Write Your Ticket with God* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, [1979]) 18.

⁶⁷ Hagin, *Believer's Authority*, 21.

⁶⁸ Hagin, *Write Your Ticket*, 20.

⁶⁹ Kinnebrew, *Positive Confession*, 17.

⁷⁰ Atkinson, *Death of Jesus*, 22; Kinnebrew, *Positive Confession*, 17.

The small booklets and magazine articles written by Kenneth Copeland emphasize one or other of the aspects of his prosperity teaching. Some articles refer to the importance of ‘dreaming’ as an aid to faith.⁷¹ This refers to believers allowing their imagination to explore the possible desired fulfilment of their faith. Other topics covered tackle issues such as wisdom in finances, faith for a significant return on donations, and becoming debt free and giving out of financial shortage.⁷² Other booklets give the basics of tithing and prosperity and the overriding importance of love in financial matters.⁷³ Jointly published by Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, *Prosperity Promises*, they claim, provides suitable scriptures for declaration to promote faith in this area.⁷⁴ Finally, Kenneth Copeland affirms he is not preoccupied with prosperity, but claims millions of dollars used for conversions to Christianity through his ministry.⁷⁵

2.4.4. John Avanzini (b.1936)

The bulk of his writings were produced in the period 1989-95, and he suggests possible laws of sowing, with the prospect of ‘reaping’ improved financial and material provision in return. Continuing in this idiom he describes the need for ‘good ground’ for sowing, relying upon what he describes as ‘God’s giving guarantee’, as the steps to prosperity.⁷⁶ His works contain a reminder that life is not based on possessions. His works also address issues of the application of God’s covenant with Abraham to contemporary believers, whilst also challenging the concept that being poor is virtuous. He also addresses debt and the belief in miraculous debt cancellation. He warns of the danger of seeking wealth for its own sake suggesting that it should be for the fulfilment of God’s purposes for the believer as well as to finance the preaching of the gospel. His focus, then, is on producing a successful and fulfilling life whilst resisting the devil’s plans to limit believers’ effectiveness through lack of

⁷¹ Kenneth Copeland, ‘Dream Big and Turn Your Faith Loose’, *Believers Voice of Victory*, 29.5 (May 2001) 4-7; ‘Dream On’, *Believers Voice of Victory*, 34.8 (August 2006) 2-5.

⁷² Kenneth Copeland, ‘God’s Wisdom – Your Priority’, *Believers Voice of Victory*, 34.5 (May 2006) 18-19; ‘Jump into the Field of Faith’, *Believers Voice of Victory*, 34.6 (June 2006) 2-5; *How to Become Debt Free*, Leaflet 0804 (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, n.d.); *Giving and Receiving* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1986).

⁷³ Kenneth Copeland, *Understanding Tithing*, Leaflet 0802 (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, n.d.); *Understanding Prosperity*, Leaflet 0803 (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, n.d.); ‘Don’t Hang the Curtains, Hang the Rod’, *Believers Voice of Victory*, 33.6 (June 2005) 2-5.

⁷⁴ Kenneth & Gloria Copeland, *Prosperity Promises* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House Inc., 1999 [1985]).

⁷⁵ Kenneth Copeland, ‘Covenant Partner Report’, *Believers Voice of Victory*, 30.7 (July 2002) 4-5; Kenneth Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing: Understanding the True Biblical Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 2004 [1997]) 44.

⁷⁶ John Avanzini, *Powerful Principles of Increase* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1989) 21-2, 30, 108, 147-151.

resources or preoccupation with the pursuit of poverty.

2.4.5. Jerry Savelle (b. 1946)

Savelle is of particular interest as an assistant to Kenneth Copeland in his ministry for some years, which he describes as a covenant relationship, before forming his own ministry.⁷⁷ Savelle is connected with Roberts also through association with Kenneth Copeland, describing him as his ‘spiritual grandfather’.⁷⁸ His commitment to Kenneth Copeland’s teaching is revealed in his biographical work, *In the Footsteps of a Prophet*, showing his introduction to Word-faith teaching.⁷⁹ Here he emphasizes the importance of declaring scripture for the strengthening of one’s faith.⁸⁰ However, in his earliest works Savelle emphasizes the importance of joy in manifestation of one’s trust in the Lord for his provision and as a route to success in spiritual conflict.⁸¹ Overall, then, Savelle adopts and develops Kenneth Copeland’s teachings in their entirety and recently has developed his own emphases on divine favour and the making and receiving of heavenly grants, where God is perceived to encourage believers to be specific in their requests (Phil 4:6).

2.4.6. Conclusion to Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers

In summary, it can be seen that the writers who initiated the prosperity message were Hagin and Roberts, who presented different emphases. Hagin introduced the Word-faith message whilst Roberts taught on the application of his *seed-faith* message, so he was not, therefore, included among Word-faith prosperity teachers. However, the influence of both of these men in the life and ministry of Kenneth Copeland must be acknowledged from whose inspiration most other prosperity teachers developed their teaching. All of these teachers emphasized that God should be regarded as one’s source of supply and most accentuated the declaration of Scripture in support of their beliefs. These teachers regard financial prosperity as a legitimate area in which believers may exercise their authority by faith, whilst resisting evil in these matters. There is also encouragement for believers to end debt in their lives, whilst expecting divine assistance in this. The teachings of these four writers are examined in chapter 4 where their hermeneutical strategies for interpreting Scripture are also evaluated.

⁷⁷ Jerry Savelle, *In the Footsteps of a Prophet* (Crowley, TX: Jerry Savelle Publications, 1999) 272 (see photo caption).

⁷⁸ Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 270 (see photo caption).

⁷⁹ Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 48-53, 83-88.

⁸⁰ Jerry Savelle, *The Force of Joy* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1988) 33-4.

⁸¹ Jerry Savelle, *If Satan Can’t Steal Your Joy ... He Can’t Keep Your Goods* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1982) 61-7.

2.5. Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers and Their Teaching

2.5.1. Introduction

There are four representative members of those classified as non-Word-faith prosperity teachers. These are Pat Francis, Clive Pick, Gary Keesee and Stephen K. De Silva. The members of this group have each contributed to the prosperity debate from their independent examination of similar themes from Scripture. This approach would therefore add credibility to Word-faith treatment of this subject, especially where there are areas of commonality between them. The non-Word-faith prosperity teachers studied are presented here, covering the major tenets of their teaching and an in-depth evaluation of their teachings will form the subject of chapter 6.

2.5.2. Pat Francis (b. 1954 approx.)

As president and founder of several companies, and as pastor of a church in Ontario, Canada, her first book traces the path to financial success through dreams and desires encouraging belief in unlimited possibilities through faith.⁸² As with Kenneth Copeland in §2.4.3., dreams refer to imagined desires and aspirations being fulfilled for the believer. Francis also teaches the importance of asking God for things desired in a clear specific manner, for which the renewing of the mind is especially important.⁸³ Francis' prosperity theology forms part of a wider faith teaching which emphasizes devotion to God, the renewal of the mind and the application of faith in the assessment of one's situation based on the promises of God revealed in Scripture.

2.5.3. Clive Pick (d.o.b. not available)

Pick developed his teaching ministry through independent study of Scripture in this country and in Canada during the latter part of the twentieth century. He has, however, produced only one book first published in 1998 providing a full prosperity doctrine covering tithing, financial righteousness and the giving of offerings.⁸⁴ He begins with God's blessing to Abraham, and its ratification as a NT doctrine through Galatians 3:13-14 and 29.⁸⁵ Pick also explores the role of faith in making donations, recognizing that evil forces are arrayed against believers, discouraging them in this

⁸² Pat Francis, *The Ultimate Secret: Keys to Seeing Your Dreams and Desires Fulfilled* (Belleville, Canada: Guardian Books, 2009) 19-53.

⁸³ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 65-106.

⁸⁴ Clive Pick, *Open Heaven: The Transformation* (Burlington, Ontario: Crossroads Christian Communications Inc., 2005 [1998]) 11-15.

⁸⁵ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 7-11.

area of faith.⁸⁶ An evaluation of Pick's hermeneutical methodology may be seen in §6.2.5., and the prosperity themes from non-Word-faith prosperity teachers are compared with contemporary commentators as seen in §§6.3.2-4.⁸⁷

2.5.4. Gary Keesee (d.o.b. not available)

Keesee has written a primary work derived largely from his experience of the application of Scripture to his own financial crisis. By profession he was a financial advisor and so his prosperity teaching is firstly a series of plans for financial control and thereafter an application of the principles of giving and receiving taken together with prudent strategies for financial increase.⁸⁸ Keesee teaches that one's finances are under the blessing of God rather than the curse. Accordingly, giving is expressed in terms of removing funds from the 'earth-curse' system, perceived by him to involve arduous labour, into God's where believers will be blessed with increase and prosperity.⁸⁹ In conclusion, like other prosperity teachers, Keesee's focus is on the role of financial sufficiency and prosperity in order to fulfil one's God-ordained purpose in life. He emphasizes that pursuing such prosperity for its own sake is misguided, and should be regarded as a means of fulfilling one's life goals.⁹⁰ These principles are again taught from the gospels (Matt 6:24-33) with the lesson that finance is only blessed when committed to God's blessing.

2.5.5. Stephen K. De Silva (b. 1961)

De Silva's book entitled *Money and the Prosperous Soul* is based on 3 John 2, a significant work investigating the concept of the prosperous soul, a major theme also for Word-faith prosperity teachers (see § 5.2.2.). De Silva appears to make prosperity an acceptable topic for Christians, defining it as a function of the well-being of the soul. He examines prosperity in the context of the economic crisis of the late 2000's, making his comments all the more relevant.⁹¹ He describes living simply, saving, creating a surplus, giving as prompted by the Lord and observing how one is prospered.⁹² His perception is that the purpose which drives one's pursuit of financial prosperity should be the fulfilment of the calling which God has given each believer,

⁸⁶ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 40-45.

⁸⁷ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 56-59.

⁸⁸ Gary Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing: A Practical Guide to Your Financial Success* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers Inc., 2011) 85-135 and 249-56.

⁸⁹ Keesee, *Money Thing*, 98-106.

⁹⁰ Keesee, *Money Thing*, 237-47.

⁹¹ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 37-55.

⁹² De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 52-53.

which represents prosperity for a God-given objective.⁹³

2.5.6. Conclusion to Non-Word-faith Prosperity Teachers

This group of prosperity teachers have no particular association with Word-faith prosperity teachers and have arrived at their individual perspectives subsequently and apparently independently. However, their teaching has some similarities to the Word-faith teachers, most often referring to the blessing of Abraham coming to the Gentiles, associated with the need to exercise one's faith in order to receive financial provision. There are three themes common among non-Word-faith prosperity teachers, to be hermeneutically evaluated in chapter 6 (see §6.3.). These are, firstly, the recognition that God is one's source of supply, for the provision of one's financial needs. Second is the importance of setting the pursuit of financial prosperity in the context of achieving of one's God-given purpose, for which it would be necessary. The pursuit of wealth for its own sake is therefore recognized as mistaken.

The third common theme among non-Word-faith prosperity teachers is the concept of 'renewing the mind' as taught in Romans 12:2. An evaluation of the hermeneutical methodology of non-Word-faith prosperity teachers will be found in §6.2.2-5., together with a comparison of their interpretation of Scripture with that of contemporary commentators (see §6.3.2-4.).

2.5.7. Conclusion to Prosperity Teaching in General

The beliefs of Word-faith prosperity teaching include the key role of receiving by faith, based upon their 'contractual approach' to hermeneutics.⁹⁴ Such prosperity teaching also includes generosity as a means of receiving God's provision. There is also an emphasis on conducting one's financial affairs in keeping with God's ways, avoiding secular financial practices and often avoiding debt. Hagin has been a major proponent of Word-faith teaching whilst Roberts' seed-faith teaching has also been influential. Both have had significant influence upon Word-faith teachers and their teaching also emphasizes God as one's source of supply, in keeping with the blessing of Abraham. They also teach that financial provision requires believers to exert their

⁹³ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 108-9.

⁹⁴ The 'contractual approach' to hermeneutics refers to the tendency of Word-faith teachers and others to regard any scripture, whatever its context, as a legitimate basis of the terms of a contract between God and believers. For further discussion on this refer to Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 88-90.

authority over evil through maintaining a 'positive confession'.⁹⁵

Non-Word-faith prosperity teachers have different emphases but with a similar approach through their independent study. They refer to the blessing of Abraham, and to the need for the exercise of faith for finances. However, they teach prosperity in the context of fulfilling one's dreams and aspirations. This they assert requires the renewing of the mind, changing from worldly attitudes towards wealth. Also, the hermeneutics of Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers are of central importance in determining the validity of the teachings they draw from Scripture. So this will form a major part of the investigation into these two groups of teachers in chapters 4 and 6 (see §§4.2. & 6.2-3.).

2.6. Critics of Word-Faith Prosperity Teaching

2.6.1. Introduction

With the arrival of increasing numbers of Word-faith proponents and their teaching, there also emerged a growing number of works critical of Word-faith prosperity teaching whose writers took exception to the message of faith and prosperity believing it to be based on faulty hermeneutics and reaching conclusions foreign to their Christian traditions. They tended to be critical of Word-faith teaching in general, being suspicious of its roots, expressing it in polemic terms by many of the authors. Of the numerous critics just two are studied in depth in this thesis, being representative of the works produced by the most outspoken critics of this genre. These are Daniel McConnell and Hank Hanegraaff and are introduced in chronological order of their dates of publication. Other critics also referred to in chapter 7 are Gordon Fee, Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon, John F. MacArthur and Bruce Barron (see §7.3.).⁹⁶

2.6.2. Dan McConnell (d.o.b. not available) (published 1990)

McConnell wrote one work critical of Word-faith teaching, including criticism of prosperity teaching. He entitled this work mildly *The Promise of Health and Wealth*,⁹⁷ although it was published in the US with the provocative title of *A Different Gospel*, indicating the degree of his scepticism of Word-faith teaching. He criticised

⁹⁵ 'Positive confession' is the practice of verbally declaring scriptures in support of the believer's faith for a desired outcome. Refer to Kinnebrew, *Positive Confession*, 52-72.

⁹⁶ As well as the authors presented here, other important works by Farah, Hunt & McMahon and Sarles have been consulted but appeared not to add significantly to the debate, whilst other relevant works by Gilley, Lioy, Mumford and Matteson were considered but appeared not to impinge directly upon this thesis.

⁹⁷ Daniel R. McConnell, *The Promise of Health and Wealth: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990).

their teaching in part on the basis of the link between Hagin and Kenyon, perceiving a dubious influence of New Thought upon Kenyon (see §1.6.2. for an introduction to New Thought).⁹⁸ McConnell particularly opposed the Word-faith prosperity teaching regarding it as an unwarranted pursuit of power and prestige, and an unworthy manifestation of lust and worldly desires.⁹⁹ An evaluation of McConnell's hermeneutics may be seen in §7.2.2.

2.6.3. Hank Hanegraaff (b. 1950) (published 1993)

Hanegraaff's work, critical of Word-faith teaching in general, represents a serious and impassioned condemnation of the attempt to show how the believer's financial situation may be improved through faith and generosity.¹⁰⁰ Prosperity teachers are accused of being motivated by greed, making no distinction between those who trust in money and those who trust in the Lord.¹⁰¹ He suggests that Word-faith prosperity teachers' hermeneutics are flawed and they are in need of basic theological training.¹⁰² It will be of particular concern to observe the quality of Hanegraaff's hermeneutical methodology when it is examined in §7.2.2.

Much of his criticism is repeated in his 1994 articles, especially part two with respect to Kenneth Copeland.¹⁰³ He opposes Kenneth Copeland's use of logic, and his failure to observe standard rules of interpretation. Kenneth Copeland is also accused of ignoring the importance of systematic theology, and of showing disrespect for the historically accepted views of the church.¹⁰⁴ It may, however, be noted that Hanegraaff's views are regarded as less influential than other critics because of his wholly negative approach which William DeArteaga regards as not a truthful representation of a movement, listing only its worst errors as he does.¹⁰⁵

2.6.4. Conclusion to the Critics

There appears to be a consensus among the critics that the message of prosperity is a misrepresentation of the gospel, which Word-faith prosperity teachers arrived at through misguided hermeneutics. The critics' assertions are summarised as a denial

⁹⁸ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 1-14.

⁹⁹ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 179.

¹⁰⁰ Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Milton Keynes: Nelson Word Books, 1995, [1993]).

¹⁰¹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 185.

¹⁰² Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 219-20.

¹⁰³ Hendrik H. Hanegraaff & Erwin M. de Castro, 'What's Wrong with the Faith Movement?-Part Two: The Teachings of Kenneth Copeland' *Christian Research Journal* (Spring 1993) accessed from <http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/copeland2.htm> in November 2010, 1-16.

¹⁰⁴ Hanegraaff & de Castro, 'Wrong with Faith Movement', 10.

¹⁰⁵ DeArteaga, *Quenching The Spirit*, 269.

that God will bless his people with more than the minimum required, and that the prosperity gospel is therefore immoral and based on selfish indulgence. Furthermore, they declare that they can find no examples of prosperity in the life of Jesus and therefore conclude that such teaching is affected by occultic influences arising from Hagin's association through Kenyon and New Thought. The accusations are serious, couched in terms such as a false dualism or a deception, being described as non-biblical or a gospel of greed with erroneous doctrine, deifying humans and distorting of the cross.

The writings of these critics, represent a wider group of authors publishing critical works in the 1980's and 90's, and have been initiators of the debate about Word-faith prosperity teaching. Their works are highly influential being widely circulated and accepted among many groups of believers. They have promoted much discussion causing further research by independent Christian scholars who have produced their research findings in works from 2000 to 2012, forming the scholarly context to this thesis. Whether such serious criticisms are securely based on careful and rigorous hermeneutics as the writers claim will be the subject of chapter 7.

2.7. Scholarly Context

2.7.1. Introduction

In the brief survey of the scholarly context of Word-faith prosperity teaching in § 1.4., the status of research was that seven significant research projects had been undertaken between 2001 and 2012, with one much earlier in 1988. These were by Kinnebrew, Bowman, Perriman who edited the report from the working group, Harrison, King and Atkinson with the final work edited by Attanasi and Yong. All of these are significant works providing valuable insight into Word-faith teaching, but only four of them have a direct bearing specifically on Word-faith *prosperity* teaching. Accordingly, the works of Bowman, Perriman, King and Atkinson will be reviewed here, whilst some theological perceptions contained in the work edited by Attanasi and Yong will form part of chapter 8 (see §8.3.). Of these the hermeneutical evaluation of just Bowman and King will appear in chapter 7. All of these authors have assessed Word-faith teaching in general in response to the works critical of it published in the latter part of the twentieth century referred to in §2.6. These representative authors of the scholarly context are examined here in chronological order of their publication dates providing a review of the areas of their research. The content of these research projects is only

reviewed with regard to those topics which have a bearing on prosperity teaching. The other authors' works forming part of the scholarly context are not reviewed in this section. This is because Kinnebrew's work predates the publication of the critical works by McConnell and Hanegraaff, making comments on them impossible, and Harrison's interesting work, based almost entirely on testimonies from members of one Word-faith church has no significant hermeneutical evaluation.

2.7.2. Robert M. Bowman (b. 1957) (published 2001)

In view of the harsh criticisms engendered in the debate between critics and advocates of Word-faith prosperity teaching, Bowman recommends a calm appraisal of the issues without resorting to inflammatory and exaggerated claims.¹⁰⁶ Bowman first addresses the criticisms regarding the roots of Word-faith prosperity teaching and their claim that it is cultic or even occultic, which he rejects, holding the view that most of their objectionable practices have their origins in classical Pentecostalism.¹⁰⁷ He distances himself from labelling such teaching as cultic as proposed by McConnell in particular because Kenyon's views are not based on New Thought as McConnell alleges.¹⁰⁸ He suggests that the language of Word-faith teachers makes their views sound more extreme than they really are and Hanegraaff, in particular, strings colourful phrases together to make their doctrine sound absurd.¹⁰⁹

The Word-faith prosperity doctrine includes references to faith-filled 'positive confession', as an aid to achieving increased material prosperity. Bowman addresses the issue that according to Word-faith theology, '...we are divine spirits created and redeemed to rule our circumstances by speaking words of faith',¹¹⁰ suggesting that wealth is obtained through such positive confession. Bowman denies that God creates by spoken words of faith, and consequently he is convinced that faith-filled words will not produce any desired outcome.¹¹¹ Bowman also observes the teaching that poverty is a curse based upon Deuteronomy 28 and that in Christ the curse has been removed (Gal 3:13-14), but he views the blessing of Abraham not as material prosperity but as spiritual well-being, believing that material blessings are in the OT but spiritual

¹⁰⁶ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 13.

¹⁰⁷ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 10-11.

¹⁰⁸ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 16-17.

¹⁰⁹ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 29-31.

¹¹⁰ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 33.

¹¹¹ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 206.

blessings are in the NT.¹¹² Moreover, Bowman doubts that Deuteronomy can be applied to the individual since it is a blessing on a nation as a whole and not applicable to individual believers.¹¹³ Bowman is also sceptical of Kenneth Copeland's belief that, since God has abundant wealth, he would want to share it with his children (Deuteronomy 28, 3 John 2, and Mark 10:29-30). He is particularly sceptical of the promised hundredfold return.¹¹⁴ Therefore Bowman sees excesses and errors in Word-faith teaching including the prosperity doctrine, and portrays it as 'suborthodox' and 'aberrant' but could not describe it as cultic since it has its roots primarily in Pentecostalism.¹¹⁵

2.7.3. Andrew Perriman (d.o.b. not available) (published 2003)

In forming his opinion about Word-faith teaching, Perriman addressed what he considers to be hermeneutical errors giving rise to their controversial doctrines. In particular, he identifies an ideological bias in their choice of scriptures, as well as a characteristic contractual approach to Scripture as explained earlier (see §2.5.7. n.142).¹¹⁶ He also notes a generally simplistic hermeneutic with its preference for literalism and its associated lack of concern over historical context.¹¹⁷ He identifies significant flaws in the hermeneutic, which, accompanied by a distinctive rhetoric, gives Word-faith prosperity teaching its perceived strangeness.¹¹⁸ The report addresses concerns over Word-faith teaching and the accusation that it distorts Scripture, sanctifies greed and promotes the worst kind of tele-evangelism. He gives the Word-faith movement a fair hearing, tracing poverty and wealth in the OT, noting the covenant with Abraham, the promise of prosperity through Moses and its use and abuse in Israel.¹¹⁹ He notes Jesus' attitude to wealth, and the possible damaging effect of prosperity on personal spirituality,¹²⁰ followed by a brief survey of financial arrangements in the early church.¹²¹ He acknowledges the failure among some Word-faith prosperity teachers to have compassion and financial integrity.¹²² The positive traits of Word-faith teaching which he identifies include giving priority to the word of

¹¹² Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 208-9

¹¹³ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 206-9.

¹¹⁴ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 212-3.

¹¹⁵ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 227-8.

¹¹⁶ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 81-8.

¹¹⁷ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 88-96.

¹¹⁸ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 100.

¹¹⁹ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 156-67.

¹²⁰ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 168-80.

¹²¹ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 181-94.

¹²² Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 198-202, 217-225.

God, believing in the power of God, optimism, promoting the kingdom of God in place of ‘Mammon’, and a theology of godly prosperity.¹²³

2.7.4. Paul L. King (d.o.b. not available) (published 2008)

King’s work reveals extensive research and carefully balanced evaluation. He compares contemporary Word-faith prosperity teaching with its earlier counterparts, describing them as ‘classic faith’ teachers, referred to as pioneers and forerunners in this thesis. King notes that many Word-faith tenets have their origins in this historical group and should not be dismissed as cultic or variant because these ‘classic faith’ teachers had indeed received ‘a scholarly theological education’ as required by Hanegraaff.¹²⁴ This, then, is the nature of King’s unique hermeneutical strategy which asserts that if the classic faith teachers adopted a certain belief, it was reliable and if they did not, such a belief was to be regarded as suspicious and doubtful.¹²⁵

Accordingly, King perceived that some forerunners of this movement, including Simpson and Cullis, believed that God wanted them to be rich.¹²⁶

The principle of ‘giving to get’, opposed by Hanegraaff, receives a more conciliatory evaluation from King, who accepts the concept of giving when accompanied by faith. King further acknowledges that the concept of seed-faith which some Word-faith teachers taught was also taught by certain pioneers and forerunners of the Word-faith prosperity movement. He identifies Spurgeon and Andrew Murray as teachers of seed-faith, noting Spurgeon’s teaching that faith’s way of gaining is giving and that the liberal person can expect to be prosperous.¹²⁷ King asserts that the avoidance of debt was also an important principle for classic faith teachers supported as it was by Müller, Spurgeon, Carmichael, Simpson and Studd (see §2.2.).¹²⁸ King also observes cautionary notes from pioneers and forerunners, expressed in terms of making God one’s focus and not allowing the pursuit of wealth to supplant that devotion.¹²⁹ In his review of the implications of the Word-faith message for personal prosperity, King deduces six clear principles for a correct attitude to money also adopted by classic faith teachers.¹³⁰ Briefly these are to cultivate a giving attitude, to stay out of debt, to

¹²³ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 217-225.

¹²⁴ King, *Only Believe*, 347; Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 219-20.

¹²⁵ King, *Only Believe*, 42-67, 87.

¹²⁶ King, *Only Believe*, 323.

¹²⁷ King, *Only Believe*, 329; Murray, *School of Prayer*, 80; Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning*, 300.

¹²⁸ King, *Only Believe*, 329.

¹²⁹ King, *Only Believe*, 327.

¹³⁰ King, *Only Believe*, 328-31.

trust God to provide for one's needs as well as praying and believing for an abundance, and to make specific requests to God for one's needs, as recommended by Müller.¹³¹ He appreciates Hagin's last book which he regards as providing a welcome correction to the excesses of the Word-faith prosperity gospel.¹³²

2.7.5. William P. Atkinson (d.o.b. not available) (published 2009)

Atkinson's study provides a detailed description of the emergence of the Word-faith movement,¹³³ and although not focussed on prosperity, it provides a valuable perspective on its roots in general.¹³⁴ The work responds to McConnell's critique of Word-faith theology in *The Promise of Health and Wealth*, and concludes that although there are worrying excesses in Word-faith teaching, McConnell's case is seriously overstated.¹³⁵ Moreover, Atkinson has addressed the issue of the prosperity gospel in his 1998 paper *Prosperity Teaching – As Bad as it Seems?*¹³⁶ The work examines prosperity teacher, John Avanzini, noting his strengths and weaknesses.¹³⁷ As the title suggests, his position is that, despite dubious inferences from Scripture, there is much that evangelicals might take note of to improve their own spiritual experience in this area. Atkinson notes Avanzini's teaching that it is God's will for believers to prosper and to be free of debt, commenting that his teaching is based upon God's promises whilst being clear and unambiguous, and gives valuable advice to those in debt.¹³⁸ However, Atkinson also observes weaknesses in Avanzini's teaching in that he advocates giving to get in the belief that Jesus himself was rich. Atkinson also regarded it as unbalanced for Avanzini taught only on money. In general, Atkinson believes that suspicion and ignorance cause evangelicals to miss Avanzini's valuable strengths which are worthy of support in his view. Atkinson's paper entitled *God's Promises to Us? - Deuteronomy and Prosperity Teaching* also contains further references to the benefit that evangelicals might receive in addressing possible distortions in their perception of a scriptural attitude to wealth and poverty.¹³⁹

Atkinson observes that the blessings of Deuteronomy are available where one obeys

¹³¹ King, *Only Believe*, 330-331.

¹³² King, *Only Believe*, 331.

¹³³ Atkinson, *Death of Jesus*, 31-34.

¹³⁴ Atkinson, *Death of Jesus*, 256-262.

¹³⁵ Atkinson, *Death of Jesus*, 46-7.

¹³⁶ William P. Atkinson, 'Prosperity Teaching – As Bad as it Seems?' (Unpublished paper presented to the Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals, 1998) 1.

¹³⁷ Atkinson, 'Prosperity Teaching', 3-5.

¹³⁸ Atkinson, 'Prosperity Teaching', 2-4.

¹³⁹ Atkinson, William P., 'God's Promises to Us? - Deuteronomy and Prosperity Teaching' (Unpublished paper given at Regents Theological College conference, 2006) 6.

God and believes his promises.¹⁴⁰ He also acknowledges the value of Word-faith prosperity teaching in taking Deuteronomy seriously, and in making worldwide evangelism the purpose for pursuing financial prosperity. He notes that the Deuteronomy passage deals with debt seriously, which Word-faith prosperity teaching emphasizes. However, this paper, focussing as it does on Deuteronomy, outlines the blessings promised to Israel, but does not broach the subject of how and to what extent contemporary believers may access these blessings, except to point out that the curses mentioned are reversed in Christ, a Word-faith prosperity teaching from Galatians 3:13-14.¹⁴¹

2.7.6. Conclusion to Scholarly Context

The scholarly works represented here were produced primarily because of the superfluity of writings hostile towards Word-faith prosperity teaching. Consequently, these scholars, aware of the excesses and extremes among Word-faith prosperity teachers, also warn against dismissing Word-faith prosperity teaching as heretical and misguided. Their conclusion to a greater or lesser extent is that, as well as the extremes of teaching, there is valuable content that could enhance the spiritual experience of sincere believers. In addressing the heated rhetoric of the critics, Bowman's appeal for calm appraisal is echoed by all the scholars forming the scholarly context of this thesis. In particular, the view is that Kenyon who influenced much Word-faith theology in general was neither cultic nor particularly influenced by his former association with New Thought. However, Bowman's view is that positive confession is not a legitimate Christian practice and doubts that the cancelling of the curse resulting from the fall and receiving the blessing in Christ can be applied financially. Perriman also draws attention to the perceived hermeneutical errors of Word-faith prosperity teachers which lead to their controversial doctrines, including ideological bias, the contractual perception of Scripture and a preference for literalism, which is not always appropriate. However, he appreciates their belief in the power of God, their primary focus on Scripture and their belief that God does indeed have financial principles for believers.

King has applied a highly distinctive hermeneutic to this subject comparing 'classic faith' teaching with contemporary faith teaching on prosperity. He perceives their roots are more with classic faith teachers than with any aberrant sect and concurs with

¹⁴⁰ Atkinson, 'God's Promises', 3.

¹⁴¹ Atkinson, 'God's Promises', 4, 6.

the simple statement by them that God does indeed want his people to be wealthy. He also identifies the concepts of ‘giving to get’ and ‘seed-faith’ as having their origins with their pioneers, where faith’s way was seen to be to give. Atkinson encourages believers to see beyond the hermeneutical errors of prosperity teachers and to take note of much that would benefit them. He observes that the blessings of Deuteronomy would be available today and that the lessons on tackling debt are worthy of attention. He sees the potential implications of the curse being broken for believers and commends prosperity teachers in their aim to provide finance for world evangelism. However, it is also apparent that there remains ample scope for a careful hermeneutical research into Word-faith prosperity teaching for there is apparently no other work wholly devoted to this aspect.

2.8. Sympathetic Supporters

2.8.1. Introduction

There are very few supporters of Word-faith prosperity teaching outside that movement and of those in this group, one is an unequivocal enthusiast, whose teaching is introduced here.

2.8.2 William DeArteaga (First published 1992)

DeArteaga responds to the critics, likening their opposition to the work of the Spirit to the manner of Christian Pharisees.¹⁴² DeArteaga regarded McConnell’s work, *A Different Gospel*, (see §2.6.2.) as a formidable challenge to the integrity of the charismatic renewal.¹⁴³ As the title of DeArteaga’s book *Quenching the Spirit* suggests, he perceives a history of opposition to the Spirit through nearly three centuries.¹⁴⁴ He believes their criticisms arise from their Reformed theological perspective regarding human initiatives with suspicion, preferring the emphasis to be much more on the sovereignty of God, whilst distancing themselves from human effort, so inappropriately abused prior to the reformation. Thus advocates of Reformed theology in the modern era believe that God is the initiator of all things. Unfortunately, in the process the work of the Spirit in inspiring human initiatives is overlooked and is replaced by an intellectual interpretation of Scripture, apparently substantially lacking the Spirit’s illumination. Accordingly, where the Spirit perhaps inspires new emphases from Scripture for this present age, Calvinistic theological

¹⁴² DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 12.

¹⁴³ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 12-13.

¹⁴⁴ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 28-127.

proponents would probably find it unacceptable.

Controversially, DeArteaga expresses the opinion that Christians have been slow to draw support for Word-faith theology from Einstein and the quantum theory, with its perception that the spoken word can cause changes at the sub-atomic level.¹⁴⁵ Thus he sees in their pharisaical approach, a Calvinistic theology which emphasizes the sovereignty of God while discounting human responsibility and initiative.¹⁴⁶ He feels sadness for those he calls ‘modern day Pharisees’ who oppose the work of the Spirit from what is described as a ‘theology of arrogance’.¹⁴⁷

2.8.5. Conclusion to Sympathetic Supporters

DeArteaga’s general case is that Word-faith teachers have valuable contributions to make to the understanding of the Christian’s life and experience through maintaining the belief and expectation that God may well provide materially and financially. This is seen to involve the exercise of faith and the maintenance of optimism regarding the positive outcome of one’s circumstances whilst trusting in God’s willingness to alleviate their lack of material provision. For DeArteaga this positive mind-set would also involve a sensitivity and responsiveness to the guidance of the Spirit in the believer’s life. A study of his work will reveal if his teaching is hermeneutically supportable (see §7.2.4.).

2.9. Concluding Remarks

The writers introduced in this chapter range from passionate promoters of Word-faith prosperity teaching to deeply sceptical critics of this teaching. There will be opportunity in chapter 7 to assess the criticisms of Word-faith prosperity teachers, both in terms of their spiritual roots and their hermeneutics. In contrast, support for various aspects of Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teaching has been identified from the pioneers and forerunners of prosperity teaching as introduced in §§2.2 & 2.3, and from their supporters in §2.8.

The assessment of the hermeneutics of all concerned in this debate will be based on a considered hermeneutical strategy derived in chapter 3 which follows where a range of hermeneutical scholars will be consulted, as introduced in §1.5.4., from which proposed ‘ideal’ principles of interpretation of Scripture will be formulated for

¹⁴⁵ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 136-46.

¹⁴⁶ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 80-85, 122-3.

¹⁴⁷ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 260-3.

application to this thesis. On this basis the biblical interpretation of Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers, their critics and commentators will be evaluated in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. This appraisal will also be supported by an assessment of the level of agreement with contemporary commentators in interpreting the scriptures concerned, enabling the value of the hermeneutics of all concerned to be considered.

Chapter 3 – Hermeneutical Strategy

3.1. Introduction

Having introduced the topic of Word-faith prosperity teaching in chapter 1 and having analysed the prosperity debate and debaters in chapter 2, chapter 3 now, in keeping with the statements in §1.2 and §1.5.4., analyses the hermeneutical principles to be applied to this thesis. As mentioned in those paragraphs, hermeneutics is central to this thesis as all parties affirm the authoritative role of Scripture and yet arrive at widely divergent conclusions regarding its teaching on Christian financial prosperity. Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a considered hermeneutical strategy for the interpretation of the relevant scriptures. In subsequent chapters this considered hermeneutical strategy will then be applied to each group of debaters, in order to evaluate the opinions expressed.

Grudem helpfully clarifies the terms to be referred to in this chapter, distinguishing between *hermeneutics* and *exegesis*. *Hermeneutics* is derived from the Greek word *hermeneuo* meaning to interpret, and is the term for the study of interpretation, especially of Scripture.¹ He further clarifies that, in contrast, *exegesis* is the process of interpreting scripture.² Thus *hermeneutics* describes the principles of interpretation whereas *exegesis* is the application of those principles for determining meaning in Scripture.

A number of Pentecostal and charismatic writers have been criticised for the superficiality of their hermeneutics which has encouraged the critics in their negative assessment of Word-faith prosperity teaching. Perriman, among others, has catalogued a considerable list of shortcomings of Word-faith hermeneutics and so this chapter will make use of his criticisms in its analysis.³ Some of the views of Perriman's working group may be challenged and the hermeneutical principles adopted aim to represent a justifiable position.

This chapter considers the application of the Scripture principle to the hermeneutical method adopted for this thesis. Thereafter, the use of the author's intention in the formation of a biblical interpretation will be examined, noting the effect of imperfections in the text and also the distinction between meaning and significance as

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994) 108.

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 108-9.

³ Perriman, *Faith & Prosperity*, 81-95.

introduced by Hirsch, and challenged by Vanhoozer. The study then moves on more directly to the mechanics of interpretation by pondering the range of texts that should be investigated as well as the techniques that could be adopted to investigate the range of possible meanings of each text. Attention will be turned to the use of translations, whilst further sections cover the role of genre in interpretation and the special considerations that need to be adopted when interpreting the OT. Finally and importantly, the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation is considered, especially in applying the Scriptures concerned. The final section summarises the findings of this chapter and describes the hermeneutical strategy arrived at for this thesis.

3.2. The Scripture Principle

3.2.1. Introduction

The Scripture principle declares that the Bible is the essential and completely reliable canon of Christian revelation. Pinnock and Callen refer to it as the only reliable way to understand God as the one who seeks to transform people into the image of Jesus Christ.⁴ Their work seeks to reverse the trend away from trust in the authority of scripture causing it to be regarded as just one of a number of possible authorities on spiritual matters.

3.2.2. The Argument

Treier supports the reversal of this trend though less passionately and advocates a proper respect for Scripture. He suggests a theological interpretation of Scripture as a response to the disconcerting erosion that has occurred through biblical scholarship.⁵ He emphasizes the need to treat Scripture as a whole whereby one part requires the perspective of all other parts to fully reveal the meaning. It also acknowledges that Scripture may have more than just one admissible meaning. Amos Yong also prefers to work from biblical bases towards the metaphysical reality and thence to arrive at appropriate hermeneutical theory and practice, in his case, with regard to pneumatology.⁶ However, he is aware of the different interpretative guidelines that are employed by different groups, as well as the personal pre-suppositional filters through which they inevitably view the Scripture.⁷ The purpose here is simply to confirm with significant scholarly support that Scripture may legitimately be taken as

⁴ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 11.

⁵ Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008) 199.

⁶ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 27.

⁷ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 27.

the authority in prosperity teaching, in keeping with all sides of this debate, as in all matters of faith and doctrine, and that the interpreter must establish rational, scriptural and impartial principles of interpretation.

3.2.3. Authoritative but with Imperfections

Despite such strong defence for the authority of Scripture, such veneration has unfortunately caused adherents to be indiscriminating in their assessment of its perfection. The Bible, in other words, is perfectly God's word but not without the natural imperfections that normally accompany human reporting of events. The verbal inspiration of Scripture nonetheless accommodates these personal distinctives (see §3.5.1.). As Pinnock and Callen identify, conservatives have over-rated the perfection of the biblical text and in so doing have minimised the human dimension of its human writers and thereby have overlooked its possible alternative interpretation.⁸ The point is that, however strongly we assert the infallibility of Scripture, we cannot in the process deny the reality of the lives and experiences of the individuals presented and of the people involved in writing it. So, insofar as believers refer to the words of any Bible character, they must be clearly attached to the physicality and reality of that person's life and existence, as well as that of the person who recounts the words and actions of other characters. As Thiselton expresses it, since the Christian world has been at pains to emphasize the humanity of Christ, then we do well to acknowledge that Scripture is the words of real people in real situations as well as being the authoritative word of God.⁹

3.2.4. Conclusion

The affirmation of the Scripture principle by all sides of the prosperity debate supports the adoption of the following principles for the purpose of this chapter: firstly, the message of the Bible as a whole must be considered in interpretation, and secondly, the interpreter must try, as far as possible, to separate himself or herself from his/her pre-suppositional assumptions. Thirdly, it would be important for traditionalists to not allow their passionate defence of the Scripture principle to prevent consideration of alternative meanings and applications of familiar scriptures. Fourthly, it may be suggested that interpreters should allow for imperfections in the biblical account without allowing them to undermine the reliability of the meaning.

⁸ Pinnock & Callon, *Scripture Principle*, 14.

⁹ Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 69.

3.3. The Author's Intention

3.3.1. Introduction

When considering the author's intention as a strategy for valid interpretation of Scripture, it is noted that the writings of one particular linguist, E. D. Hirsch, have been widely regarded as making a valuable contribution to discussions regarding hermeneutical method. In this section a selection of scholars has been consulted representing opposing views on this topic. Their views will facilitate the elucidation and justification of the position adopted for this study, considering its importance and suggesting its limitations.

3.3.2. E. D. Hirsch Jr. (b. 1928)

Hirsch approached hermeneutics from a linguistic perspective and in two particular works has advocated the centrality of the author's intended meaning as a starting point for interpreting Scripture or indeed any literature.¹⁰ Thiselton appears to support the role of the author's intention, suggesting that a valid interpretation is obtained through the author's meaning.¹¹ With theological interpretation in mind, Treier also supports seeking the author's intention as a valid aim of interpretation, suggesting the methods by which this is to be done.¹² Vanhoozer's work on the role of morality in interpreting Scripture is supported by Cosgrove's advice on the ethics of interpretation, whereby the interpreter is morally obliged to present the authorial intent and thereby honour the wishes of the author.¹³ He finds Hirsch's defence of the verbal meaning of the author compelling.

Cotterell and Turner also address the role of the author's intention and conclude that the author's meaning is a vital preliminary in the hermeneutical process.¹⁴ They ask whether the author's meaning is the only acceptable meaning, because Hirsch is quoted as declaring that a text can only be interpreted from the author's perspective.¹⁵ The question therefore arises as to how one should assess what the author's intention was, whether it should be based simply on what has been written in the Bible or

¹⁰ E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, MI: Yale University Press, 1967); *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

¹¹ Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 37, 127; Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 231-33; *Aims of Interpretation*, 146-58.

¹² Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 134.

¹³ Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text*, 376-8; Charles H. Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 178.

¹⁴ Peter Cotterell & Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989) 52.

¹⁵ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 42; Hirsch, *Aims of Interpretation*, 49.

whether the intention should be discerned from sources outside Scripture. Cotterell and Turner point out the difficulty which ensues when a meaning is defined as that which ‘the reader clothes the text in’, because this makes the meaning indeterminate.¹⁶ They quote Hirsch who affirmed that only the author’s intention was a valid basis for determining meaning since it makes the meaning determinate.¹⁷

3.3.3. Meaning and Significance

Because Hirsch implied essentially just one meaning from any text he made allowance for variety of legitimate interpretations by distinguishing between *meaning* and *significance*.¹⁸ Thus the author’s original meaning remains determinate whilst its significance incorporates a range of acceptable applications of the text. As Osborne reasonably observes there is a core meaning which is invariable with a diverse range of implications from the text.¹⁹ This distinction has met with some approval and has broadly been adopted by Thiselton, Osborne, Cotterell & Turner and Vanhoozer amongst numerous others.²⁰

3.3.4. Criticisms of Hirsch’s Theory

Treier seeks to demonstrate that the author-centred approach is not as influential as the other authors quoted thus far would suggest, indicating that, although the principle is accepted, it should allow interpretation involving later texts or contexts affecting its understanding.²¹ Also, Osborne identifies a significant weakness in Hirsch’s approach because there was apparently no method for attesting the truth of one particular interpretation amongst others.²² This is mainly because Hirsch offers no strategy for determining the author’s elusory intention. Cosgrove maintains that Hirsch’s principles may resolve conflicting interpretations by firstly giving the most probable intention of the author, but when none is apparent, simply acknowledging the likely interpretations with the present understanding of hermeneutical theory.²³

However convenient the *meaning/significance* distinction may be, it remains unclear

¹⁶ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 56.

¹⁷ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 31, 62-67.

¹⁸ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23; Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 103-26.

¹⁹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23; Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1-13, 103-126.

²⁰ Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 500; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 349; Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 72/3; Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text*, 259-65.

²¹ Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 153/4.

²² Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 496.

²³ Cosgrove, *Scripture in Moral Debate*, 179.

how to distinguish between them.²⁴ Osborne quotes Kaiser who suggests acquiring the meaning by taking into account the context and relating this to the author's intention. Thereafter, significance involves transferring the meaning into a contemporary context for today's reader.²⁵ The problem that Juhl addressed was the sense of intimidation felt by interpreters if they dared go beyond the author's intention, and so he argued for a more flexible approach still acknowledging the clear relationship between the author's intention and the textual meaning of the statement.²⁶ Yet, strangely, it appears that this is exactly what Hirsch himself had allowed, for Cotterell and Turner argue that 'Hirsch does not claim that we need to know the author and have an account of his intention before we can understand what he writes.'²⁷ The reader may be forgiven for supposing that this is exactly what Hirsch had *not* allowed. An explanation lies in the belief that intention can be inferred from the person's writings assuming that it may be regarded as a systematic entity. So, the conclusion is perhaps that meaning can be inferred even where the author's intention is unknown. Yet it is also possible that authors may fail to say what they mean, for Hirsch also insists that meaning is a property of speech and can only be applied to people and not texts. Unfortunately, this appears to be in conflict with his comments about intention being inferred from the written text.²⁸

Another aspect of Hirsch's model, according to Cotterell and Turner, is that his decisive view of authorial meaning renders some areas of significance legitimate whilst others are rejected for similar reasons.²⁹ However, Cotterell and Turner regard demarcation between the two as difficult because of the invisible barrier separating those significances that are in keeping with the author's intent and those which are not. So the process of exegesis requires the scholar to explain the meaning of words and the things they represent as well as the multitude of expressions they refer to. In addition, he or she must also give guidance as to the intended significance of the writing. This, then, provides a safer route to a reliable hermeneutic. Yet in the process, it seems that one may have lost any significance beyond that anticipated by the author. Thus, Cotterell and Turner's approach to Scripture appears entirely

²⁴ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 497.

²⁵ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 498, quoting Walter C. Kaiser.

²⁶ Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text?* 241; P.D. Juhl, *Interpretation: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980) 87.

²⁷ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 61; Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 14-19.

²⁸ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 60.

²⁹ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 100.

intellectual, making no mention of the Holy Spirit's guidance in revealing significance. (See §3.8.4. for further consideration of this topic).

In conclusion, Hirsch has apparently provided the basis for viable interpretation of Scripture since his meaning/significance distinction is useful and feasible, despite a number of unresolved aspects. His concept of just one meaning for the text based on the author's intention is convincing and provides for a number of legitimate significant applications facilitating 'formal' and 'dynamic' interpretations of the text. But, in the succeeding sections consideration is given to direct criticism of Hirsch as well as two other opposing views.

3.3.5. Opposing Views – Vanhoozer

Vanhoozer acknowledges the wide appreciation of the recovery of the author's intended meaning, yet forms a contrary opinion based on the writings of Derrida and Bloom amongst others.³⁰ Vanhoozer takes issue with Hirsch in his assertion that the meaning of the text is simply the intention of the author, whereas those whom Vanhoozer consults promote the belief that the text has a meaning of its own.³¹ Moreover, Vanhoozer criticises Hirsch's meaning/significance distinction as a 'metaphysical impulse' where meaning is derived by means other than the actual text.³² This is because Vanhoozer perceives there to be a divide or 'ugly ditch' between verbal meaning and author's intent. So, Hirsch's critics question if the author's intention is recoverable. But quoting Hirsch, Vanhoozer comments that certainty is impossible with regard to the author's intention, so the literary critic deals with likelihoods which Hirsch himself described as 'imaginative reconstruction of the speaking subject'. So, from what Vanhoozer believes, the bare text appears capable of such misinterpretation that Hirsch's methods appear all the more valuable.³³ However, Vanhoozer contrariwise suggests that such 'co-textual drift' cannot be prevented by authorial intent.³⁴

Vanhoozer cites Derrida, suggesting that this undoes any confidence in interpretation based on the author's intent being legitimate.³⁵ It represents a move against the clear and unambiguous meaning of Scripture and towards any one of a range of possible

³⁰ Vanhoozer, *Meaning to This Text*, 74.

³¹ Vanhoozer, *Meaning to This Text*, 75.

³² Vanhoozer, *Meaning to This Text*, 77.

³³ Hirsch, *Validity of Interpretation*, 242; Vanhoozer, *Meaning in this Text*, 79.

³⁴ Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text*, 79.

³⁵ Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text*, 80.

meanings. This appears to be somewhat undermining of Christian values and generally appears unhelpful. Moreover, it seems that Vanhoozer is too confident in asserting that recourse to the author's intention during the course of interpretation is a mistake.³⁶ Logic will perhaps answer his criticism. In any communication, say, from an aged aunt, her letter may contain grammatical errors or even wrong words, yet one would not take offence, discerning very clearly the overall intent of the letter, in the light of previous communications and other parts of the letter. The meaning is clear, even though the text of the letter is ambiguous. No such belief in the text having a meaning of its own appears to be supportable, and there are no texts without authors. Therefore, it would not be acceptable to suggest that the verbal entity functions on its own, because it makes no allowance for the way different authors use their words, nor does it allow for differences in context.³⁷ One would, however, have some sympathy for doubting that the author's intention is identical with what is said in the text, since this makes no allowance for imperfections in the text.

Vanhoozer has based his reliance on secular philosophy in an attempt to make an uncertain criticism of the value of the author's intent with a view to replacing it with a hermeneutic based upon the 'meaning of the text'. Both options have their own difficulties and the 'meaning of the text' appears to have at least as many problems associated with it. At the same time he removes the useful reference point of the author's intention in the name of objectivity. However, his view has the benefit that he is not looking for meaning from outside Scripture, which is of concern to him. Moreover, as mentioned in §3.3.3., Vanhoozer is subscribing to the meaning/significance distinction, based apparently on his perception of the meaning of Scripture.

3.3.6. Two Other Dissenting Voices

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) desired to move hermeneutics away from cognitive attachment to Scripture basing meaning upon revelatory experiences whilst reading the Bible.³⁸ Revelation was regarded as a transformation of the human consciousness, with doctrine arrived at from religious self-consciousness, not from divine revelation. Pinnock and Callen express concern over a possible conservative

³⁶ Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text*, 82.

³⁷ Contra Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text*, 82.

³⁸ See references to Schleiermacher's work in Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 46.

over-reaction resulting in a *false objectivity* which leaves no role for the Spirit.³⁹

Indeed, it must not be concluded that revelatory experiences of the heart are false or misleading in themselves, nor, on the other hand should they be allowed to replace careful study of the Scripture. Thiselton's response to Schleiermacher, which Treier quotes, is to recommend the pursuit 'of scholarly exegesis alongside personal and theological engagement with the scriptural texts.'⁴⁰

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) questioned the determinate meaning of Scripture and argued that the meaning of a text is produced when the 'horizon of the reader' encounters, overlaps with and responds to the 'horizon of the text'.⁴¹ Yet even here, with what seems to be an opposing view, Cotterell and Turner perceptively recognize that this concept of two horizons could in fact be what gives rise to the distinction between meaning and significance as introduced by Hirsch.⁴² The conclusion drawn is that there are applications which some will understand, accept and adopt, while those with more confined horizons will fail to perceive them.

3.3.9. Conclusion

The concept of the author's intention remains the most reasonable basis for the focus of the interpretative process and provides the most probable starting point for this investigation despite Vanhoozer's different focus, and the doubtful emphases of Gadamer and Schleiermacher. The aim is a single meaning from the text and when uncertain, the most probable one will be selected. It is important from Hirsch's point of view, that the author's intent be discernible even where the writer remains unknown. Significance remains an important concept, allowing for both an apparent and a fuller meaning of Scripture. This will be the subject of §§3.8.3- 4. where the role of the Holy Spirit in this regard will be considered.

3.4. Selection of Texts

3.4.1. Introduction

Critics suggest that the Word-faith message of salvation is skewed to incorporate

³⁹ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 183/4.

⁴⁰ Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 140-1; Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 237-8, 266.

⁴¹ Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2002 [1994]) 296.

⁴² Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 52/3.

prosperity, and that the scriptures are selected for that purpose.⁴³ So, it is important to consider a valid strategy for the selection of texts. Firstly, an unbiased choice of texts must be considered and the inclusion of both texts supporting and those contrary to the issue in question. Furthermore, the choice of texts from all parts of Scripture will be considered together with an assessment of whether they would all have the same standing in supporting a doctrine.

3.4.2. Unbiased Selection of Texts

The choice of texts most often selected by Word-faith prosperity teachers will form part of the evaluation of their interpretation.⁴⁴ Word-faith prosperity teachers are accused of bias in their selection of texts and for Perriman, the dependence on a handful of carefully chosen texts would be a clear weakness in their hermeneutics.⁴⁵ Perriman also acknowledges that some of Copeland's writings display elements of systematic theology which are directed at supporting his message and making it accessible and practical.⁴⁶ However, it seems he and other Word-faith prosperity teachers do not give attention to apparently opposing positions also found in Scripture. Word-faith teachers would claim texts are selected that make their point most clearly. So this study will investigate both texts in support of prosperity teaching and those critical of it. This will ensure that the interpretation is balanced.

It has become apparent that, for some scholars, texts from different parts of Scripture cannot be regarded as having the same standing as God's word to contemporary believers. Dunn, for example, questions whether there was one single orthodoxy as expressed by Scripture.⁴⁷ He appears to have come to the conclusion that there were many different expressions of the gospel in the early days of the church which nonetheless retained a common essential proclamation of the gospel.⁴⁸ He observes that in varying situations the gospel was different, making it difficult to identify a

⁴³ Gordon D. Fee, *The Disease of Health and Wealth Gospels* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006 [1985]) 14, 16, 44; Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 226; McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 179; Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 82-83.

⁴⁴ The main scriptural support for Word-faith prosperity teaching comes from Gen 12:1-3, Lev 19:18, Deut 8:18; 28:1-14, 1 Kings 17:8-16, 2 Kings 4:1-7, Mal 3:20, Matt 13:3-9, 18-23, Mark 4:3-20, 11:22-24, Luke 4:18-19, 2 Cor 8:9, & 9:6-12, Gal 3:13-14, 29, 3 John 2.

⁴⁵ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 84.

⁴⁶ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 84.

⁴⁷ James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Enquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2002 [1977]) 2, 6.

⁴⁸ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 11, 29-30.

single unifying expression of the gospel.⁴⁹ Dunn observes that certain OT writings were foundational for the early church, forming an important unifying aspect of their practice and beliefs. Current experiences were explained in terms of their fulfilment of OT prophecy as for example on the day of Pentecost with Peter's speech on the basis of 'this is that...' (Acts 2:16-21, Joel 2:28-32). So, as Dunn observes, it was important for NT believers to discover the continuity between OT scriptures and their current experience and faith.⁵⁰ However, he observes that Jewish scriptures only maintained their authority in as much as they could be re-interpreted in keeping with the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁵¹

3.4.3. Conclusion

Firstly, one concludes that a balanced selection of texts, both those supporting and those opposing prosperity teaching ought to be considered, to form a reliable conclusion. Where Word-faith prosperity teachers and others intentionally avoid apparently opposing scriptures, this would make their position more doubtful. Also, it is appropriate to draw texts from OT and NT, always remembering that OT scriptures will require careful re-contextualisation before application to the financial well-being of believers, whilst maintaining appropriate continuity between the OT and the NT.

3.5. Use of Translations

3.5.1. Introduction

The use of translations will enable people to engage successfully with Scripture at the level of their competence and shows every prospect of revealing a range of nuanced implications. Therefore, this section will consider the use of translations to facilitate a reasonable appreciation of the interpretation of the key Scriptures. In part it will be based on the belief that every word in the original biblical language is inspired by God, as supported by McQuilkin.⁵² Such inspiration, however, does not eradicate the personal idiosyncrasies of the human author.

3.5.2. A Legitimate Alternative to the Study of Biblical Languages

McCartney and Clayton offer encouragement to those who do not know the Bible's original languages that English translations 'generally encapsulate the best that

⁴⁹ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 32.

⁵⁰ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 100-1.

⁵¹ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 101.

⁵² Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992 [1983]) 9.

modern scholarship has to offer',⁵³ for Scripture is often translated by a significant group of experienced scholars, who very probably will have considered all the aspects of translation in a way a single competent translator might not. So, where a prosperity teacher adopts the practice of studying a text in a number of translations this may well enable an acceptable interpretation to be arrived at.

3.5.3 Selection of Translations

The selection of various translations has not been a major concern to Word-faith prosperity teachers, certainly for works written in the twentieth century, using the Authorized Version almost exclusively. Translations differ in accordance with the priorities of the translators. Some translations use formal equivalence, where the translator seeks to preserve as much as possible of the structure of the early Greek or Hebrew text, as well as trying to provide the nearest equivalent words to it, making a minimum number of interpretive deductions, leaving more of this task to the reader.⁵⁴ The disadvantage is that the style tends to be wooden and sometimes part or the whole of the meaning is obscured.⁵⁵ The New American Standard Bible is a good example of such a translation. Savelle, among Word-faith prosperity teachers includes some references to this version.⁵⁶

In contrast, there are more translations displaying dynamic equivalence where the aim is providing more lucid translations with clearer meanings for the sentence as a whole, giving the reader less opportunity to see alternative meanings.⁵⁷ Amongst such translations, are the New English Bible and the individualistic J B Phillips paraphrase of the NT. Word-faith prosperity teachers have referred much more latterly to this type of translation including The Message, The New Living Translation and Phillips Translation.⁵⁸ Other translations that fall between these two extremes include the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of 1989 produced from an independent update on the RSV of 1952.⁵⁹

3.5.4. Conclusion

The strategy proposed here involves the use of various translations ranging from those using formal equivalence to those where the equivalence is more dynamic. Such a

⁵³ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 179.

⁵⁴ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 179.

⁵⁵ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 179.

⁵⁶ Jerry Savelle, *The Favor of God* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2012) 4; *Can't Steal Your Joy*, 4.

⁵⁷ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 179-80.

⁵⁸ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, vi; Avanzini, *Debt Reduction*, 8; Savelle, *Favor of God*, 4.

⁵⁹ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 180.

strategy is appropriate because the prosperity debaters are all using a variety of translations for their discussion and even though Word-faith teachers have had a preference for the King James Version, Kenneth Copeland and others now quote the New King James Version as well as other translations.⁶⁰ So this thesis will enter the debate at the level where their discussion is based. This, together with the use of commentaries, shows every promise of providing a fruitful contribution to the evaluation of the interpretation of Scripture.

3.6. Genre and Historical Context

3.6.1. Introduction

This section considers the impact of the various genres on interpretation. Perriman suggests that a disregard for genre results in statements being made to mean whatever the interpreter may wish. He believes this would constitute a ‘crude contractual hermeneutic’.⁶¹ Perriman asserts that more careful hermeneutical methods will cause the interpretation of texts to take account of genre and historical background.⁶² This is in contrast to Word-faith interpretation where no scripture is regarded as inappropriate for contemporary readers on the basis of genre or historical context.

3.6.2. The Nature of Genre and Historical Context

A genre is a literary form, or a type of literary composition, in which the author uses different types of communication each of which has its unwritten and intuitively perceived rules of interpretation.⁶³ There is a diversity of genre within Scripture, and quite often a variety within one book. Another definition notes literary genre as ‘a group of written texts marked by distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing’.⁶⁴ Implicit in the writing of certain genres is the expectation that the words are intended to have figurative meaning, so for example one would not necessarily expect the words of Psalm 18 to be taken literally; ‘...smoke and fire belched forth from God’s mouth... the Lord parted the heavens, shot bolts of lightning at the enemy, laid bare the very foundations of the sea’ (Psalm 18:8-13). As Cotterell and Turner observe, the literary style conveys a suitable sense

⁶⁰ Kenneth Copeland, *The Blessing of the Lord* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 2011) 2. This shows that *The King James Version*, *The Amplified Bible*, *The New King James Version* and *the New International Version* are all quoted by Copeland.

⁶¹ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 92.

⁶² Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 92.

⁶³ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 223.

⁶⁴ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 99, quoting J.J. Collins.

of awe without causing the reader inappropriate distress.⁶⁵ Consequently, this research will give due consideration to literary style or genre when exploring the meaning of texts. Due regard for genre may imply significantly less literalism in the interpretation of some texts, but there will still plausibly be some relevant application.

The interpretation will also give due regard to the historical context of a text, where the events of the time in question must be considered to enable the interpreter to extract the scriptural principle from the circumstances of the historical context surrounding it. For example, Perriman is sceptical about the material blessings that might be available under the New Covenant, questioning what it means to be a descendent of Abraham (Gal 3:29).⁶⁶ He notes Abraham received much of the blessing through the land that God provided, and since NT believers obviously do not receive Israel's land, there may be some equivalent basis upon which they receive their blessing. The original promise (Gen 12:1-3) was spoken regarding a potentially agrarian society whose economy relied solely upon the land. So, for the contemporary believer, with due consideration for the historical and literary context, 'the land' may simply refer to the means by which the blessing comes. In a modern context, it may be considered that God's blessing comes to believers through those skills and abilities which he has given in order to supply financial provision.

3.6.3. Conclusion

The nature of genre is important in interpretation of the diverse forms of Scripture where each type of literature requires its own specific form of interpretation for contemporary believers. The writer of the text may not facilitate a direct implementation of the text's meaning for the recipient, but by the use of complex associations the interpreter will derive a rather more nuanced meaning. The historical context should be taken into account in distinguishing between those texts which may be interpreted more directly and those requiring a non-literal interpretation, where the context would make a more direct interpretation inappropriate for contemporary believers.

3.7. Use of the OT in the NT and in Contemporary Christianity

3.7.1. Introduction

Critics of Word-faith prosperity teaching oppose the appropriation of any text from

⁶⁵ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 99.

⁶⁶ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 89; for further discussion of the application of OT motifs to contemporary believers see §3.7.3-6.

Scripture taking it as a promise from God to the individual. It is asserted by critics that OT promises cannot be taken and applied directly to the church today.⁶⁷ This universalisation of Scriptural texts is perceived as a failure to discriminate between two different covenants.⁶⁸ The purpose of this section therefore is to investigate appropriate ways of interpreting OT scriptures for believers today. Important guidance on this topic will be drawn from the way NT writers handle OT Scriptures.

3.7.2. OT in the NT

It is fairly obvious that there are frequent references to the OT in the NT, with about three hundred direct quotes from the OT and thousands of allusions where the writer assumes the reader has a wide knowledge of the OT. The OT was greatly respected by NT believers as the very words of God, and it was their canon (2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:21).⁶⁹ The conclusion must be that, if it was revered by them, contemporary believers ought not to dismiss it as irrelevant. Indeed, a unifying strategy that shows how both testaments work together, and how they relate should be sought. This is what will emerge in the following sections.

3.7.3. Typology

Typology is a way NT believers interpret the OT and types are often people. Osborne identifies typology as the method whereby occurrences in the history of Israel are related to the NT's present.⁷⁰ This assumes history is focussed and is moving towards a God-given conclusion and purpose which the NT writer can discern. It is also perceived that the OT prophets projected their vision into the future as an analogy from the past because they could not see with clarity what their perceptions indicated. But the past event gives an indication of what God will do in the future.⁷¹ It is helpful to view OT types as an incomplete picture, which NT and contemporary believers may be able complete. In other words, it might almost be said that a clear picture of the Lord's purposes cannot be acquired without the OT types. So, these concepts relate to the idea of promise and fulfilment in the relationship between OT and NT.⁷²

3.7.4. Allegory

This is another form of language noted by Osborne and it involves a symbolic

⁶⁷ Charles Farah Jr., *From the Pinnacle of the Temple* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1979) 20-1; Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 88.

⁶⁸ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 89.

⁶⁹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 323.

⁷⁰ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 328.

⁷¹ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 163.

⁷² Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 328.

interpretation of the OT. In Scripture an allegory involves the ascribing of a new related spiritual meaning to events, things or people in the OT.⁷³ Osborne suggests Hosea's marriage to Gomer (Hosea 1:1-9), the Song of the Vineyard (Is 5:1-7) and Sarah and Hagar, Abraham's wives (Gal 4:24-31), allegorically represent Israel's attitude to God, Israel's rejection of Christ and the nature of the new covenant in Christ. The NT on occasion does clearly take such OT stories allegorically, as for example in Galatians 4:22-26 where the wives of Abraham are seen to represent two covenants. This demonstrates to some degree a model for the allegorical interpretation of the OT, although such interpretations should be treated cautiously where the NT offers no allegorical interpretation.

3.7.5. *Sensus Plenior*

The potential for additional application of a text to be revealed to readers of a later time frame gives rise to the concept of fuller meaning or *sensus plenior*. As Osborne observes, there is adjustment to the meaning of a text as the NT author sees Jesus or the church experiencing afresh an OT event.⁷⁴ And this additional meaning may not be understood by the OT author even though it is clearly apparent to the NT writer.⁷⁵ However, it is recognized how easy reading things into OT texts without justification would be, so certain guidelines must be adopted to safeguard the meaning. But without the fuller meaning the OT would simply become a tool for Judaizing those receiving its instructions.⁷⁶ Pinnock and Callen also note that in NT times the OT was part of the *symbolic universe* for early Christians.⁷⁷ They also note that Jesus and the apostles used the OT *dialectically*, whereby, on the one hand they endorsed it as the written word of God, yet on the other they '...interpret it as if it were a pre-messianic text coming to fulfilment in their time' and thereby perceive a fuller meaning to the OT scriptures.⁷⁸ Pinnock and Callen suggest useful guidelines from the teaching of Jesus on the use of the OT.⁷⁹ They note that Jesus was more concerned with the message than the exact phraseology, and secondly, that his present age was more significant than past ages. Unsurprisingly, the third principle is that love is more important than following the Mosaic law, while another guideline is that all the

⁷³ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 329.

⁷⁴ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 328.

⁷⁵ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 164.

⁷⁶ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 166.

⁷⁷ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 62.

⁷⁸ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 63.

⁷⁹ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 64-66.

scriptures testify to Christ. These principles offer guidance in discerning the fuller meaning of the texts concerned.

Jesus and the apostles made use of the OT with what Pinnock and Callen refer to as ‘messianic qualification’.⁸⁰ Jesus and the apostles saw the text arranged around the promises of God fulfilled through the incarnation. In arriving at the fuller meaning it is therefore appropriate to look for on-going motifs together with regions of fulfilment and also noting points of negation. Importantly, such exegesis would only be acceptable if one saw Jesus as the promised One who would fulfil the OT motifs.⁸¹

Due to the danger of relativism Pinnock and Callen offer additional strategies for its avoidance. They suggest the importance of ensuring that the original human meaning is not violated but is clearly linked to the fuller meaning.⁸² In addition, they suggest, firstly, that the NT gives a valid perspective on the OT where it is referred to, and secondly, it also enables obscure texts to be interpreted in the light of unambiguous texts. McCartney and Clayton note NT typology suggesting that a genuine type has a legitimate *sensus plenior* if the event’s place in God’s redemptive plan is known, and has a clear relationship to the later plan of redemption which it prefigures.⁸³ Also, the type must be drawn from the main content of the story it relates to, as well as having a fulfilment which is more important than the type. Therefore these principles may be applied to those large areas of Scripture where neither typology nor *sensus plenior* are recorded in the NT.⁸⁴

3.7.6. Redemption History and the Transition from OT to NT

Naturally, there are cultural changes from OT to NT and beyond, where the principles remain the same requiring only re-contextualisation.⁸⁵ For example, the OT injunction not to muzzle the ox while threshing (Deut 25:4) is re-contextualised in the NT to refer to the remuneration for pastoral oversight (1 Cor 9:9-11). However, there are exceptions to this where changes in redemptive history have occurred. For, not all of the OT is of current Christian application, including references to circumcision and the provisions of the law.⁸⁶ Pinnock and Callen affirm that Jesus did not teach that OT

⁸⁰ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 67.

⁸¹ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 68.

⁸² McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 169-171.

⁸³ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 167.

⁸⁴ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 167.

⁸⁵ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 172.

⁸⁶ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 173.

texts were an immutable truth for all succeeding generations.⁸⁷ This is perhaps best illustrated in Matthew 5-7, where he declares a different requirement with regard to the law. For the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to observe that the OT requires interpretation in keeping with the current age and generation, but it is not intended, however, to undermine the value of the OT. For, when viewed from a messianic perspective, it may be argued that the OT is released to serve the Christian gospel bringing fresh themes from it.⁸⁸

3.7.7. Conclusion

Since NT writers quote or allude to the OT so frequently, contemporary interpreters should adopt their methods. Undoubtedly it requires careful interpretation, but can provide useful confirmation and insight into NT principles. It is also necessary for the purpose of interpretation to distinguish between the various modes of expression which the OT uses, identifying whether the OT is speaking directly or through typology or allegory, whose specific rules for interpretation should be adopted.

OT authors probably project forward towards the fulfilment of OT types and figures whose ultimate fulfilment they could only dimly perceive. But it behoves the contemporary interpreter to do justice to the OT writers by making the connection between their OT prefigurement and the NT, contemporary and future fulfilment of their writings. This process may well make use of *sensus plenior* to more completely arrive at legitimate significances of OT Scriptures. This makes sense of the *symbolic universe* which the OT presented to the NT authors. Although some OT motifs are now no longer applicable, the interpretation of the OT will require a knowledge of the text's location in salvation history and how it relates to the plan of salvation which it prefigures, drawing always upon the major themes of the text.

3.8. The Role of the Holy Spirit

3.8.1. Introduction

Osborne suggests three perspectives for the work of interpretation,⁸⁹ briefly summarised as, firstly *the laws of interpretation*, and secondly, the acquired skill of applying those laws, including surprisingly the suggestion of the use of one's imagination (see Yong §3.8.4.).⁹⁰ Osborne's third important perspective is the

⁸⁷ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 68.

⁸⁸ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 69.

⁸⁹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 21-2.

⁹⁰ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 222-4.

recognition that interpretation of Scripture is a spiritual act which is dependent upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. He quotes Barth who depended upon God for ‘flashes of insight’, regretting that modern scholars too often ignore this dimension, regarding scripture as merely a genre of literature.⁹¹ Accordingly, this section will consider how the Spirit interacts with the individual in the interpretation of Scripture. Scholars, other than Osborne, of a more Pentecostal persuasion see a different trialectical hermeneutical strategy, based on Spirit, word and community. Therefore this section contains a sub-section on community to give consideration to this important aspect (see §3.8.5.).

3.8.2. Meaning of the Author

At this point it is appropriate to refer back to §3.3.2., to the work of Hirsch, who argues for the author’s meaning as the essential starting point for the hermeneutical process,⁹² also distinguishing between meaning and significance and affirming that a text has essentially one meaning, with a range of implications.⁹³ On this basis, then, one can reasonably conclude that the Spirit would be associated with the *significance* of the text. In other words, it is appropriate scholarship to expect the Spirit to apply a text to people in different yet legitimate ways, always providing that the significance cannot be inconsistent with the author’s original meaning if known. Opponents of Word-faith prosperity teaching may find this unpalatable, since they apply the Scripture principle in a rigid way making no allowance for possible variation in interpretations, or for the possible illumination of the Spirit.

None of the above is intended to give free rein to those Pentecostals and charismatics who habitually claim to receive ‘revelations from the Holy Spirit’. This has been the basis for considerable attack upon charismatics as for example in the writing of MacArthur who regarded such pursuits as responsible for misinterpretation.⁹⁴ Atkinson admits that such criticism is ‘well justified’ but argues that these excesses are no excuse for disposing of the whole inspirational aspect of interpretation and producing a *reductionist hermeneutic* where ‘immediate Spirit-enabled awareness of meaning’ is abandoned in favour of a purely grammatico-historical exegesis.⁹⁵ He

⁹¹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 22.

⁹² Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1-23; Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 52.

⁹³ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 61-67; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23.

⁹⁴ John F. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992) 96.

⁹⁵ William P. Atkinson, ‘Pentecostal Hermeneutics - Worth a Second Look?’, *Evangel* 21.2 (Summer 2003) 49-54, citing 52.

recommends two precautions to make this possible. Firstly, the pneumatic exegesis must be carefully based on thorough grammatico-historical exegesis and secondly, that individual exegesis must be submitted to a group of believing peers for appraisal.⁹⁶ Such a strategy enables the text to have a broader range of implications as directed by the Spirit. For, as Osborne observes, the Spirit does not do the work for the believer, who must still use cognitive ability to extract information from the text upon which the Holy Spirit will bring illumination (e.g. 1 Cor 2:2 and 2 Cor 4:4-15).⁹⁷

Archer on the other hand appeals against over-interpretation, suggesting a *semiotic* strategy of interpretation where the interpreter looks for significant signs in the original text as opposed to the excessive use of semantics in the process.⁹⁸ In his view this will be consistent with a greater sensitivity to the author's intent as well as being a strategy that the Spirit may facilitate. Another important way of respecting the author's intent whilst also seeking wider significance with the Spirit's guidance involves the use and interpretation of analogy. Spawn observes that it is a concept that involves the '...intersection of the *testimony* of Scripture with an interpreter's perceptions of past *experiences*'.⁹⁹ It also explains how differing interpretations may arise where interpreters have differing points of intersection with analogy because of their differing experiences.¹⁰⁰ Pinnock refers to Karl Rahner who draws on a parallel between the example of romantic love and our covenant partnership with God, equating hermeneutics with the lover's attempt to express his emotions in words.¹⁰¹

Vanhoozer notes that evangelical scholars are also intent on the recovery of the original author's intention to preserve the meaning of the text and that Pentecostal scholars would have the same objective whilst also pursuing the Spirit to reveal the meaning.¹⁰² So, accordingly, Noel asks the question as to whether there is a distinctly Pentecostal hermeneutic, for Vanhoozer suggests that it is no more than a

⁹⁶ Atkinson, 'Second Look', 52.

⁹⁷ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 436.

⁹⁸ Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009 [2005]) 216-7.

⁹⁹ Kevin J. Spawn, 'The Intersection of Biblical Testimony and Experience: Toward the Conceptualization of the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Interpretation of 1 Kings 17:17-24' in Johnson T. K. Lim (ed.) *Holy Spirit: Unfinished Agenda*, (Singapore: Word N Works, 2015) 3-7 citing 4. Italics in original.

¹⁰⁰ Spawn, 'Biblical Testimony and Experience', 7

¹⁰¹ Clark H. Pinnock, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics', in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993) 3-23 citing 15.

¹⁰² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Reforming Pneumatic Hermeneutics' in Johnson T. K. Lim (ed.) *Holy Spirit: Unfinished Agenda*, (Singapore: Word N Works, 2015) 18-24, citing 19.

grammatical-historical method with the added dimension of the Spirit's guidance and illumination.¹⁰³ The problem which Noel observes from Archer whom he quotes is that the grammatico-historical method which Pentecostals are now adopting focusses on the world behind the text and not on the text itself. So, from Archer's point of view, the grammatico-historical form of interpretation is at least insufficient for the task, requiring a clear focus on the texts involved with also a conscious cooperation with the Spirit in finding his meaning for contemporary believers, as considered in the following subsections.

3.8.3. *Sensus Plenior and the Holy Spirit*

The term *sensus plenior* implies that a text's meaning may extend beyond the author's meaning. Surprisingly, Hirsch regarded this as wholly unnecessary, for he advised that, if the meaning is beyond the human author's meaning or willed type, then we have to look for another author, whose meaning may go beyond the initial author's.¹⁰⁴ His implication is that God may have a meaning beyond the human author's intended or unintended meaning. However, this appears to negate his *meaning/significance* distinction. So for the purposes of this thesis it will be considered that implications inspired by the Holy Spirit will fall within the general meaning and intent of the author, always recognizing that greater distance in time and culture between writer and reader, will increase the possibility of expanding the human author's meaning and its application by the Holy Spirit.

Marshall considers that deeper meaning may often accompany the movement from OT to NT. He quotes John 12:41, noting that a pre-Christian commentator on Isaiah would have given a very different interpretation, whereas a contemporary commentator would say that he was speaking about Jesus, even though the original human author could but dimly perceive the glory of the Son.¹⁰⁵ So, for the purposes of this chapter, only a deeper meaning or potential Spirit-inspired significance not in conflict with the author's meaning or intention will be accepted, although it may not necessarily be encompassed by it.

It is a well understood and fundamental principle in this debate that Scripture is the final authority for all matters of faith and doctrine because it is inspired by the Holy

¹⁰³ Bradley Truman Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010) 156.

¹⁰⁴ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 126.

¹⁰⁵ Marshall, 'Introduction', 16.

Spirit. It is also widely agreed that the same Spirit who inspired Scripture in its original language is also available to assist in its interpretation. The expression is often used that the Spirit is engaged in the ‘illumination’ of Scripture implying a somewhat lesser role for him than in its original inspiration. However, Clark Pinnock questioned this differentiation in the role of the Spirit in inspiration and illumination and recommended an upgrading of the assessment of the Spirit’s work in interpretation referring to ‘... an original and a contemporary inspiration by the Spirit ...’, suggesting that the deriving of the contemporary interpretation is no less a work of inspiration than the original inspiration of Scripture.¹⁰⁶ His view was that contemporary theologians were nervous about any proposal which may appear to undermine the profound importance of the original inspiration of Scripture, but in his view the original inspiration of Scripture was achieved by essentially the same operation of the Spirit as contemporary interpretation of Scripture.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore he declared that contemporary inspiration was needed because the purpose of the original inspiration fails if not imparted to the reader by the Spirit for otherwise ‘it remains a dead letter and fails to impact people’.¹⁰⁸

3.8.4. Pneumatological Imagination

This concept is Yong’s term for the impartation of insight into biblical interpretation from his work on theological hermeneutics. He holds that theological perception relies upon the work of the Spirit to illuminate heavenly truths in our minds (1 Cor 2:9-16).¹⁰⁹ He makes the suggestion that novel interpretations may come through the imagination inspired by the Spirit. He suggests the pneumatological imagination seeks out new applications of the system of values inherited and also discovers different contexts, actively seeking to apply its values to them. He proposes a mechanism by which the Spirit leads believers into all truth (John 16:13) and directs them to previously unrealised significance and spiritual acquisitions.¹¹⁰

He perceives possible strain between the inspired imagination and the weight of hermeneutical tradition.¹¹¹ Yong is hopeful that a gift of the Spirit involving *creative fidelity* will enable Spirit-led hermeneutics to take place dependably so tradition may

¹⁰⁶ Pinnock, ‘Spirit in Hermeneutics’, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Pinnock, ‘Spirit in Hermeneutics’, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Pinnock, ‘Spirit in Hermeneutics’, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 222.

¹¹⁰ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 223.

¹¹¹ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 224.

be adjusted and opened up to new, legitimate insights, providing a feasible mechanism for Spirit-inspired interpretation. It suggests the wisdom of allowing Spirit-directed thoughts along less trodden paths of inspired interpretation (Jer 33:3). Thus, as Noel suggests, this amounts to an acceptance of the grammatico-historical methods of evangelical scholars together with Spirit-inspired illumination in the minds of interpreters.¹¹²

The pneumatological imagination clearly involves the human mind, whose mental processes the Spirit inspires, for as Stronstad observes one cannot understand the truth of Scripture without the Spirit.¹¹³ For he says the Spirit knows the thoughts of God and opens human minds to comprehend them to a greater or lesser extent.¹¹⁴ Archer therefore advises that for such a process to be effected the interpreter must open his or her mind to God's Spirit, because it must be acknowledged that, as Pinnock observed, God's purposes go beyond one's intellectual powers and are to be spiritually discerned through friendship with God.¹¹⁵

3.8.5. Community

It is apparent that Yong's work on the Spirit, word and community is by no means the only such work on pneumatic hermeneutics, for there appears to be a widespread discussion on the role of the Spirit in interpreting Scripture. Moreover, it is the role of the community of believers which receives by far the most discussion in the debate on this subject. For example, Vanhoozer emphasizes the importance of the community in the process of hermeneutics, for he observes that the Spirit works through community to derive meaning from Scripture that is consistent with their experience.¹¹⁶ Archer also places emphasis on the role of the Pentecostal community of believers, seeing a 'dialectical interdependent relationship' between the text and the community in which the Spirit's purpose is discerned.¹¹⁷ As a result, the Spirit guides the community into the meaning of Scripture whose manifestation the community also authenticates.¹¹⁸ Such validation of interpretation is not believed to be a simple or momentary process, for Archer perceives four levels of authentication; firstly, through the Pentecostal

¹¹² Noel, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics*, 156.

¹¹³ Roger Stronstad, 'A Lukan Model of Pneumatic Hermeneutics' in Johnson T. K. Lim (ed.) *Holy Spirit: Unfinished Agenda*, (Singapore: Word N Works, 2015) 12-17 citing 12.

¹¹⁴ Stronstad, 'Lukan Pneumatic Hermeneutics', 12, 15.

¹¹⁵ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 252; Pinnock, 'Spirit in Hermeneutics', 18.

¹¹⁶ Vanhoozer, 'Reforming Pneumatic Hermeneutics' 18-19.

¹¹⁷ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 213-4.

¹¹⁸ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 248-9.

practice of allowing high levels of testimony through which the community affirms the meaning given.¹¹⁹ Secondly, the community's validation process includes living out the interpretation in the lives of its members, and thirdly by the proposed interpretation being subjected to cross-cultural application.¹²⁰ Fourthly, Archer recommends that such interpretations be open to the scrutiny of the academic community for their contribution, pointing out that this does not imply that they have the final say on the matter necessarily.¹²¹

Pinnock too advocated the focus on the corporate rather than the individual in hermeneutics and commented that such interpretation of the community leads to a yearning for unity among the denominations.¹²² However, he does caution that God apparently leads individuals in unexpected directions and that interpreters should acknowledge that individual believers can hear God say something different to them.¹²³ Vanhoozer also notes the valuable contribution of what he calls 'the Pentecostal challenge' referring to their renewal hermeneutics designed to include readers as active participants but expresses three concerns regarding it.¹²⁴ He perceives that their 'zeal for community' is taking Pentecostals into unwarranted excesses. However, Vanhoozer should perhaps bear in mind that it is entirely appropriate to engage the attention of the wider community when it is the ministry of the Spirit in interpretation that is being sought. Moreover, his concern is also that community is producing meaning rather than consuming meaning, but this seems to be an unwarranted over-simplification, for it is the community that validates the suggested interpretation derived by other parts of the community. Community therefore implies not the congregation in the average church but all branches of believers. Vanhoozer is also sceptical that the much vaunted role of the Spirit in hermeneutics might be something less than '...a mighty rushing wind...' and more '...a whispering shrug of the shoulders.'¹²⁵ Perhaps he has a point here, for the role of the Spirit is much advocated by Pentecostals as the essential mediator of the meaning of the text, but little is said as to what it means in practice to access his assistance.

As releasing as the concept of the pneumatological imagination may be to Pentecostals

¹¹⁹ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 256.

¹²⁰ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 258-9.

¹²¹ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 260.

¹²² Pinnock, 'Spirit in Hermeneutics', 16, 21.

¹²³ Pinnock, 'Spirit in Hermeneutics', 22.

¹²⁴ Vanhoozer, 'Reforming Pneumatic Hermeneutics', 21.

¹²⁵ Vanhoozer, 'Reforming Pneumatic Hermeneutics', 21.

and charismatics, it does appear susceptible to fanciful interpretations. Accordingly, Yong also acknowledges the balancing value of the Christian community to which all such interpretations should be submitted for approval, working upon the principle of acceptance among the wider community with its creeds and principles.¹²⁶

Interpretations must ultimately form part of the church's theological beliefs and transformations in their theology take place as opinion moves towards an adjustment of doctrine and praxis.¹²⁷ Yong argues that imagination guided by the Spirit is beneficial in the positive transformation of theological interpretation.¹²⁸ This is not a manifestation of *individualistic autonomy* but, as Thiselton emphasizes, a hermeneutic of *communicative action* based on inter-subjectivity.¹²⁹ The result will be a development of revised theologies accounting for new experiences of God.¹³⁰

3.8.6. Conclusion – Pinnock and Callen acknowledged in 1984 that introducing the Spirit into hermeneutics was likely to be controversial, observing his absence to a considerable extent from both sides of the liberal/conservative debate, perceiving that neither side had identified the role of the Spirit in granting insight into Scripture.¹³¹ This may well pin-point the nature of the divide between Word-faith prosperity teachers and their opponents. The critics appear resistant to any development of meaning in the texts whereas Word-faith prosperity teachers, who may receive genuinely inspired applications, all too often do so without the regulatory safety of the full range of hermeneutical principles.

As Pinnock and Callen perceive, the doctrine of Scripture cannot by itself guarantee soundness of life in the church, unless faith in the working of God's Spirit is present also.¹³² So for the purposes of this thesis it will be considered that the enlightening work of the Spirit will lie within the author's meaning and in the inspiration of implications clearly consistent with it.

With regard to the burgeoning discussion over Pentecostal hermeneutics and the Spirit-word-community trialectical hermeneutic, it appears that much of Pentecostalism has been moving towards a Spirit inspired grammatico-historical

¹²⁶ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 275-310.

¹²⁷ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 282-4.

¹²⁸ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 285.

¹²⁹ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 285; Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 100, 289.

¹³⁰ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 284.

¹³¹ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 181.

¹³² Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 183.

interpretation of Scripture, where the scholastic excavation of texts is not dismissed but rather accepted as the basis for Spirit-inspired application and significance for believers. What this means is that Pentecostal hermeneutics are moving more in line with and are producing a greater degree of agreement with evangelical hermeneutics. This then raises the question put forward by Noel, as to whether there can now be a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic, for one would have to concur that the grammatico-historical hermeneutic has much to offer in deriving the all-important author's intention in Scripture. That said, it would also require additional focus on the text itself, whilst also appealing to the Spirit for his further revelation. Whether this amounts to illumination of the Spirit or to contemporary inspiration as proposed by Pinnock remains uncertain but a Pentecostal approach to the process certainly appears to 'push the door open' to wider meanings and applications of the text whilst also incorporating the valuable safeguard of consultation with the wider Christian community.

3.9. Concluding Remarks

The Scripture principle is widely adopted and despite the attacks of the late twentieth century remains a central foundation of this chapter. More importantly, it is broadly accepted by all parties to this debate. Also, the view of the Bible as a whole should be considered in forming interpretations and personal presuppositions should be guarded against preventing their imposition on the meaning of a text. Furthermore, it is recommended that traditionalists should not consider that applying the Scripture principle requires them to hold rigidly to one particular meaning for a text, but should allow for the possibility of other interpretations not inconsistent with the human author's general intention.

The author's intention presented by Hirsch, remains the starting point for all interpretation, contrary to Vanhoozer's views whose emphasis on the meaning of the text presents at least as many problems as the intention of the author. Gadamer and Schleiermacher's interesting perspectives could not be adopted as the basis for this work. The meaning/significance distinction is helpful and enables varying but not inconsistent implications to be drawn from the text. Hirsch did not provide any guidance over the selection of appropriate significance, but the later part of this chapter suggests that the Holy Spirit may be relied upon to guide believers and their communities in the interpretative process.

The selection of texts is an important consideration for chapters 4 and beyond, involving an assessment of the degree to which various groups of debaters pay attention to the full range of biblical perspectives of wealth and prosperity. The aim as set forth by the hermeneutics scholars is the unbiased view of the whole Bible, whilst also recognizing that texts have a different standing depending upon the part of the Bible from which they are drawn. There is also perceived to be a need for recognition of continuity from the OT to the NT. The way NT writers treated the OT is noted as a model for the way in which contemporary believers should treat the OT and the NT. Finally, as Dunn perceives, one seeks validity of any doctrine from the diversity of approaches to it from the various parts of the Bible.

The use of translations is also recognized as a valid way of examining the various shades of meaning for a particular text, which forms the basis of much Word-faith interpretation of Scripture, for it is recognized that most English translations of the Bible, especially of the more formal equivalence are the product of a large group of well-respected scholars. Consequently, the outcome of their deliberations may clearly be more reliable than that of the individual Greek scholar of more limited experience. The choice of translation will be between the more formal equivalence preserving as much as possible of the structure of the original language and the dynamic equivalence where the meaning of the sentence as a whole is presented. This choice will be guided by one's position on the verbal inspiration of Scripture, and here McQuilkin's view that the individual words of Scripture were inspired may well direct the choice for this thesis towards the more formal equivalence in biblical interpretation.

Genre and historical context involves an awareness of whether a text should be applied directly or figuratively, for each genre has its own distinctive type of writing with its own requirements for the interpretative process for contemporary believers. It is this aspect which is perceived to be ignored by Word-faith teachers, who may nonetheless have an intuitive awareness of how scriptures from the various genres ought to be interpreted. Their critics perceive that they disregard genre and historical context in favour of what they describe as a 'crude contractual hermeneutic' which they take to be entirely misguided, but which may be perceived to be less so in view of their general acceptance of the verbal inspiration of Scripture. Nonetheless, it is still a matter of concern whether the material blessings of various genres can be legitimately regarded as a promise of material blessing for contemporary believers.

The OT in the NT and beyond is of particular importance regarding the way the OT is used by NT writers. Hermeneutical scholars recommend that the OT should be interpreted typologically or analogically by contemporary believers. Therefore, the impression is given that the OT should be non-literal for the church. However, it is noted that NT believers respected the OT and regarded the allegorical approach as relevant but requiring a different application. In that regard it is therefore perceived that the OT has a *sensus plenior* or deeper meaning for NT believers. It is noted, for example, that Jesus re-interpreted the OT ensuring that the original human meaning was not violated but rather enhanced. Typology and analogy therefore produce a legitimate deeper meaning when their place in redemption history is taken into account. This, therefore, requires re-contextualisation and recognition that the OT cannot be regarded as an immutable truth for succeeding generations.

Finally, *the role of the Spirit in Interpretation* is broadly acknowledged with Pinnock & Callen as well as Yong appealing for the Spirit's work in this regard to be recognized, whilst Pinnock later appealed for an 'upgrade' of the Spirit's illumination to be regarded as contemporary inspiration by the Spirit. However, the grammatico-historical aspect of interpretation is still an important part of this process which together with the illumination of the Spirit will produce a valid reading of the scriptures concerned. The Spirit's role also involves the intersection of Scripture with experience arriving at a legitimate significance for the believer. Furthermore, the author's meaning as proposed by Hirsch is regarded as the basis for the Spirit's enlightenment. Therefore, the implication or significance for the believer is inspired by the Spirit and falls within the author's intended meaning, or at least is not inconsistent with it. The pneumatological imagination as proposed by Yong may provide a mechanism for seeing more clearly further insights as directed by the Spirit. All of the above may be adopted but only within the context of an astute and spiritually aware Christian community where interpretations can be weighed and adopted in the fullness of time. For Vanhoozer, the Spirit's role in interpretation is regarded as overrated and not a significant or a reliable aspect of interpretation. Furthermore, he is unimpressed with what he regards as the Christian community generating meaning for Scripture. However, apart from his negative perception there is reasonably general acceptance of the illumination of the Spirit and the place of the community.

The hermeneutical strategy thus derived will be the basis for the evaluation of the Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teaching as well as that of the critics and commentators of prosperity teaching. Chapter 4 presents a hermeneutical evaluation of Word-faith prosperity teaching, followed in chapter 5, where the themes common to Word-faith prosperity teaching are also evaluated hermeneutically, by the formation of a comprehensive categorised prosperity theology. Its elements have sufficient support from the hermeneutical evaluation and from the view of contemporary commentators on the scriptures used to support it. Such a theology, developed in three categories, will emerge from the analysis of prosperity teaching also providing considered practical, scriptural advice for believers of all persuasions. Thereafter, chapter 6 will offer a hermeneutical evaluation of non-Word-faith prosperity teaching, followed by an evaluation of the teaching of the critics and commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching in chapter 7. Chapter 8 will be the final assessment of the categorised approach to prosperity teaching including an evaluation of the hermeneutical issues discussed together with an analysis of the theological issues raised.

Chapter 4 – Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers

4.1. Introduction

The beliefs of the pioneers and forerunners introduced in chapter 2 of this thesis formed the basis for the development and emergence of Word-faith prosperity teaching from the mid-twentieth century. In chapter 3 this thesis formulated an ‘ideal’ considered hermeneutical strategy in the light of which the interpretation of Word-faith teachers and others on this subject will be evaluated. The interpretation is also compared with a range of contemporary commentators for confirmation.

The term *Word-faith prosperity teacher* as introduced in chapter 2 (see §2.4.) refers to those who emphasize the exercise of faith for improving the financial circumstances of life for the believer. The early influential figures for this group were Hagin and Roberts, and although the latter was an important pastoral figure for a number of Word-faith prosperity teachers, he emphasized the concept of *seed-faith* rather than the *Word-faith* emphasis of the rest of the group. The substance of Hagin’s teaching was received from Kenyon, but no such connection is apparent with Roberts who did, however, value the teaching of Yonggi Cho from South Korea. This group is therefore assessed on its teaching regarding faith and the concept of financial prosperity from God, together with the role of the verbal confession of Scripture.

This thesis has been prompted by works critical of Word-faith prosperity teaching cited in §2.6., which accuse such teachers of heresy and corrupt manipulation of gullible followers. However, it is not the purpose of this chapter to assess the critics’ often polemic attacks, but to allow the prosperity teachers to make their case and to carefully evaluate their hermeneutical strategy. William Kay suggests some of the issues regarding Word-faith prosperity teaching which this hermeneutical evaluation should address. This teaching is perceived to be that Christians should prosper, something the Assemblies of God agree to but which the Elim denomination does not.¹ Accordingly, this study will investigate whether prosperity is automatic or is rather something available to believers if they choose to exercise their faith in response to such scriptures. Kay asserts from the prosperity message that God wants to make Christians prosper, but this chapter will investigate if it is not rather an opportunity which believers may choose to apply to their lives through faith.² He advises that

¹ Kay, *Pentecostalism in Britain*, 45.

² William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009) 270.

much is made of 3 John 2 as a prosperity scripture linked with the example of God's blessing upon Abraham (see §5.2. theme 1).

In chapter 5 a categorised prosperity strategy is formulated, using these hermeneutical strategies, from the major Word-faith prosperity themes where there is agreement with contemporary commentators. Thereafter, in chapter 6 the teaching of non-Word-faith teachers will be presented, followed by chapter 7 where the opinions of the critics and commentators will be evaluated. Much of the criticism launched against Word-faith teachers surrounds the life and experience of E.W. Kenyon, but although this has been relevant to healing and other aspects of their teaching, it appears that Kenyon had almost nothing to say on prosperity issues, so he will not feature significantly in this thesis. Finally, because there are a considerable number of Word-faith prosperity teachers, a choice has had to be made so that just four are presented here that cover the full range of such teaching. These are Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Avanzini and Savelle.

4.2. Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers

4.2.1. Introduction

This section analyses and evaluates the teaching of this group of prosperity teachers who were associated with Hagin, Roberts and Kenneth Copeland, whose works were published from 1966 to the recent past, representing some different emphases in this area. Their perceived hermeneutical methods for the interpretation of Scripture are assessed by comparison with the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3, noting the extent to which each of them has adopted this hermeneutical strategy in forming their opinions. An evaluation is made of the adoption of the Scripture principle, the authors' intent, meaning and significance, the selection of texts, the use of various translations, genre and historical context, the use of the OT as well as the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation.

4.2.2. Kenneth E. Hagin (1917-2003)

Introduction – Hagin's writings spanned the period from 1966 to 2000. The main aspects of his prosperity teaching are set out below. They are then used to discover and assess how Hagin interprets Scripture. These aspects are set out in the appraisal of Hagin's hermeneutics which follows this section (see §4.2.3.).

His Teaching - Hagin remarked repeatedly that poverty was not to be regarded as

equivalent to humility,³ quoting Deuteronomy 28:15 as evidence that the curse included poverty.⁴ He also perceived that one's needs would be met in Christ (Phil 4:19),⁵ concluding that God did not want his servants to be poor.⁶ Hagin provided evidence for the view that Jesus was not poor during his earthly ministry,⁷ despite the references to being born in a stable and having nowhere to lay his head (Luke 2:7; 9:58).⁸ Paul wrote '...though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor' (2 Cor 8:9), and the latter, Hagin asserted, was upon the cross and not during his earthly ministry.⁹ This would appear consistent with Galatians, which states that 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us...' (Gal 3:13). For Hagin asserted that neither Jesus nor his ministry were impoverished (Matt 2:11, 4:12-13, 14:15-21, 15:32 – 38, 17:24-27, Mark 2:1, Luke 8:1-3, John 2:3-11, 12:6- 8, 13:29, 19:23-24).¹⁰ Indeed Hagin gave the impression that Jesus was well provided for whilst not lavish or extravagant in his lifestyle.¹¹

Hagin perceived that when needed, Jesus confidently expected divine supply. So, Hagin recommended a similar mind-set, encouraging believers to aim to reproduce this scale of provision for ministry, seeing themselves exercising God-given authority and expecting its fulfilment as those seated with Christ (Eph 1:22).¹² Furthermore, as heirs with Christ, Hagin perceived that believers had authority to bind and to loose where demons may be involved, thereby preventing constraints on believers' finances.¹³ Therefore, believers should regard themselves as rich, strong and confident in their faith,¹⁴ retaining what they have in Christ (Rev 3:11).¹⁵

Hagin quoted Isaiah 1:19 that if a person is willing and obedient he or she will eat the good of the land,¹⁶ implying placing God's word first in one's thoughts (Deut. 28:1-

³ Hagin, *Believer's Authority*, 40; *Redeemed from Poverty*, 4.

⁴ Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty*, 1, 3.

⁵ Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty*, 3.

⁶ Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Midas Touch: A Balanced Approach to Biblical Prosperity* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 2002, [2000]) 6.

⁷ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 41-72.

⁸ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 41-43.

⁹ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 43.

¹⁰ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 47-56.

¹¹ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 62-63.

¹² Hagin, *Believer's Authority*, 22, 41-43.

¹³ Hagin, *Believer's Authority*, 39, 48, 55; Kenneth E. Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1983 [1968]) 36.

¹⁴ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, c. 2003 [1966]) 26.

¹⁵ Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking*, 36.

¹⁶ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 7, 12-14.

13).¹⁷ Hagin considered material prosperity was dependent upon spiritual prosperity (3 John 2).¹⁸ He sensed being directed by God to ask for finance whilst also commanding the devil to stop withholding such money. This was developed into a four-stage strategy for receiving funds described as ‘say it, do it, receive it and tell it,’¹⁹ describing a state of expectancy with the resolve to make the miraculous provision well known through testimony. Hagin emphasized the value of verbally expressing one’s faith (Rom 10:10, Mark 11:23),²⁰ encouraging positive confession based on Joshua’s experience (Joshua 1:8).²¹ Hagin also encouraged believers to stop negative confession concerning lack and to speak only positively.²² He also cautioned that one should give only as God directs.²³

Hagin taught on righteousness in finances, stressing the importance for him of tithing based on Malachi 3:10 and Hebrew 7:8.²⁴ An important part of his prosperity message, believed to be of considerable significance, was that one had not given until one had paid one’s tithes. He emphasized the importance of this teaching by pointing out that the instruction to tithe came some 500 years before the law of Moses. So, as Hagin affirmed, the first step towards financial blessings is to obey Scripture on tithing.²⁵ The other aspect of financial righteousness Hagin taught was always to be responsible in one’s financial obligations, so that if one had a debt one should pay it reliably and punctually.²⁶ Hagin asserted that the devil resists believers in their finances causing fear of financial lack.²⁷ He taught that believers were to remember their deliverance from the powers of darkness and to rule in their own circumstances (Col 1:13-14),²⁸ expecting angelic assistance in financial matters, while resisting thoughts of poverty which represent demonic interference.²⁹

One of the major features of Hagin’s final book was to highlight and renounce perceived forms of erroneous or excessive prosperity teaching in order to bring

¹⁷ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 8.

¹⁸ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 9.

¹⁹ Hagin, *Write your Ticket*, 5-20.

²⁰ Hagin, *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 26, 39.

²¹ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Godliness is Profitable* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1982) 23.

²² Hagin, *Right and Wrong Thinking*, 51-52.

²³ Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty*, 6; *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 33; Kenneth E. Hagin, *Obedience in Finance* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 2003 [1979]) 5-8; *Midas Touch*, 22.

²⁴ Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty*, 8-9.

²⁵ Hagin, *Obedience in Finances*, 4-5, 9-15.

²⁶ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 211-2.

²⁷ Hagin, *Godliness is Profitable*, 20-21.

²⁸ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Knowing What Belongs to Us* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1989) 19-20, 25.

²⁹ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 31, 38.

balance to this area. He rejected Roberts' teaching on naming seed and the hundredfold return (see §5.2.6.), the concept of miraculous debt cancellation (see §5.2.4.) and the 'end-time wealth transfer',³⁰ widely espoused by other Word-faith prosperity teachers, from which teaching Hagin later distanced himself. It therefore appears that Hagin latterly moderated his prosperity teaching as a response to growing criticism of the extreme views of other prosperity teachers of that time.

Overall Conclusion – Hagin's observation was that Jesus was not poor but neither was he ostentatious in his lifestyle, always having more than sufficient for every situation. He also taught that the curse was broken for believers and so they could follow Jesus' example regarding finances having concluded that believers were new creatures in Christ and therefore worthy recipients of divine supply since they were ruling with Christ. Therefore Hagin taught that believers were in authority over the spiritual influences affecting their lives and may legitimately bind the evil spiritual forces involved. For he concluded also that the devil resists believers in their finances and that following conversion they are likely to be in the process of extracting themselves from the devil's influence and interference in their lives both financially and materially. Therefore believers must trust in God and expect his provision.

Overall, then, Hagin believed that increasing prosperity should naturally follow conversion of the believer. He apparently advocated a prosperity teaching having two components, one involving *righteousness*, entailing tithing and honest financial dealings. The other aspect was the use of *faith* in increasing personal prosperity through giving and receiving (2 Cor 9:8, Gal 6:7-9, Phil 4:14-19),³¹ as well as by trusting in God rather than in money (1 Tim 6:5-10, 17-19).³²

4.2.3. Kenneth E. Hagin – Appraisal of Hermeneutical Methodology

Introduction – Hagin's hermeneutics are compared in this section with the aspects of the considered hermeneutical strategy derived in chapter 3. These are addressed one by one with an assessment of the extent to which he adopted the aspect of the hermeneutical strategy in question.

Hermeneutical Aspect 1 – Scripture Principle – Despite Hagin's undoubted affirmation of the Scripture principle there is evidence of his deviation from it latterly.

³⁰ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 143-173.

³¹ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 218-9.

³² Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 224-5.

This occurred with his attempt to bring balance to the prosperity debate with his 2000 work *The Midas Touch*. However, Hagin's corrective was perhaps not based on Scripture, for when he rejected *giving to get, naming your seed, and the hundredfold return*,³³ his objections appeared more based on logic than Scripture. Despite manipulation by ministry leaders to promote donations, these teachings having scriptural support, and however difficult the hundredfold return may be to comprehend, it cannot be denied as a teaching of Jesus (e.g. Mark 4:20, Matthew 19:29, Luke 8:8 – see §5.3.7.).

Hermeneutical Aspect 2 – The Author's Intent – Hagin showed some regard for the author's intended meaning. For example, he quoted Romans 10:10 in support of positive confession as an aid in receiving finances, offering some suggestion as to Paul's meaning which was in the context of Israel's rejection of Christ and of salvation for those who declare their faith in him.³⁴ Also, when referring to Colossians 1:13-14 Hagin was consistent with the author's intended context of walking worthy of the Lord.³⁵ So, in these examples Hagin follows Hirsch's principle that the author's intention is the starting point for interpretation.³⁶ He legitimately applied this principle but in a varying yet not inconsistent manner as permitted by Cotterell and Turner.³⁷ However, for scriptures other than the Pauline epistles Hagin's attention to the author's intent is less apparent. For example, he referred repeatedly to the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 with little regard for the author's purpose.³⁸ He drew from this chapter the importance of obedience in receiving the blessings described.

Hermeneutical Aspect 3 – Meaning/Significance – There is broad consensus that, although there is perceived to be just one meaning for a text based on the author's intent, there will also be a range of legitimate implications for contemporary application.³⁹ Although Hagin made no overt reference to this principle, when referring to 2 Corinthians 8:9 he apparently suggested that Christ became poor on the cross and derived the significance that, not only have believers received the riches of

³³ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 139-50.

³⁴ Hagin, *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 25-6.

³⁵ Hagin, *What Belongs to Us*, 19-20.

³⁶ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 231-3.

³⁷ Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 100.

³⁸ Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty*, 1, 3; *Midas Touch*, 8.

³⁹ agreed by Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1-13, 103-26; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23; Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 500; Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 72-3; Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text*, 260-2.

salvation but also with it financial prosperity on the basis of the curse being broken for believers.⁴⁰ Hagin also quoted Isaiah 1:19 describing that, if Israel were willing and obedient, then their agricultural endeavours would prosper.⁴¹ Hagin made reference to this context but regarded its significance as applicable to the financial prosperity of the believer. This significance is possibly legitimate but Hagin made no reference to the change in context and position in redemption history. As McCartney and Clayton claim the principles applying may be the same but they require contextualisation absent in Hagin's account.⁴²

Hermeneutical Aspects 4 – Selection of Texts - Supporting Perriman's view that texts selected in support of a doctrine should present the view of the whole Bible and should not be based on just a few texts.⁴³ Furthermore, Dunn adds that with OT texts the continuity from OT to NT should be demonstrated, and that OT texts will require re-interpretation.⁴⁴ Hagin demonstrates a diversity of Scripture in support of his teaching and also an apparent preference for the Pauline epistles, as acknowledged by Atkinson.⁴⁵ Hagin apparently believed they represented a greater inspired understanding of the spiritual principles involved. Therefore, prosperity was a matter regarding which the individual believer needs to exercise his or her faith, and should not be regarded as a sovereign choice of God. In so doing, the believer might make use of what Yong later referred to as the pneumatologically inspired imagination where he or she may form a mental image as a graphic representation of the significance of the scripture concerned.⁴⁶

Hermeneutical Aspect 5 – Use of Translations - Hagin's writings show a decided preference for the Authorised Version, particularly in his earlier works. For example in one of his earlier works *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness and Spiritual Death* thirty five scriptures are quoted and all of them from the authorised version with its antiquated language.⁴⁷ This may be because it provides formal equivalence where more of the individual words are preserved, which takes account of the verbal inspiration of Scripture where the words in the original languages are themselves

⁴⁰ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 45-6.

⁴¹ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 7, 11-15.

⁴² McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 172.

⁴³ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 84.

⁴⁴ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 100-1.

⁴⁵ Atkinson, *Death of Jesus*, 68.

⁴⁶ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 223.

⁴⁷ Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty*, 65.

inspired as claimed by McQuilkin.⁴⁸ However, in his 2000 work he turns primarily to the New International Version, with references to no less than seventeen other translations including several very obscure translations.⁴⁹ Indeed, there is value in using a range of translations as proposed by McCartney and Clayton, although in this case it seems to have been taken to excess.⁵⁰

Hermeneutical Aspect 6 – Genre and Historical Context – Cotterell and Turner, quoting J. Lyons, define genre as ‘a group of written texts marked by distinctive reoccurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing’.⁵¹ Of the many genres in Scripture McCartney and Clayton identify theological history, law, poetry, prophecy, parables, epistles and the apocalyptic as each having their own distinctive rules of interpretation.⁵² However, for experienced students of Scripture these rules are often intuitive and non-specified. In the case of Hagin, however, there was little or no attention given to genre or historical context, preferring instead to apply a ‘crude contractual hermeneutic’ using any text to give some of the terms of God’s agreement with human beings.⁵³ For example, Hagin quotes Philippians 4:19 teaching that all of one’s needs will be met by God: financial, material and other needs.⁵⁴ However, no mention is made of the historical context of the previous generosity of the Philippians upon which the promise is based.

Hagin referred very infrequently to the OT, quoting only from Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah and Malachi. He quoted Deuteronomy 28:1-13 referring to the blessings for believers but made no adjustment in transferring the principles involved from law to the contemporary believer.⁵⁵ He suggested that keeping God’s commandments equates with spiritual prosperity and made no connection with salvation in Christ. Accordingly, because of Hagin’s disregard for genre and historical context, Perriman is sceptical that contemporary blessings in Christ are material as taught by Hagin.⁵⁶ Hagin also quoted Isaiah 1:19 declaring that one would be prosperous if one were willing and obedient.⁵⁷ But he did not refer to this as a

⁴⁸ McQuilkin, *Applying the Bible*, 9, 113-24.

⁴⁹ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 179-80.

⁵⁰ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 179-80.

⁵¹ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 99.

⁵² McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 223-43.

⁵³ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 92.

⁵⁴ Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty*, 3.

⁵⁵ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 8.

⁵⁶ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 89.

⁵⁷ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 7, 11.

prophecy and how it might be fulfilled in the lives of contemporary believers, for whom the OT law and prophets have been modified in Christ. So, in general, it must be observed that Hagin gave little noticeable attention to genre as recommended by McCartney and Clayton, although Hagin's considerable experience does suggest some intuitive awareness of it. However, the awareness of genre and historical context will not necessarily be possessed by his readers who would have needed the clarity of teaching on this subject that this would have brought.⁵⁸

Hermeneutical Aspect 7 – OT to NT and for Contemporary Believers – The Scripture principle does not necessarily mean that the OT is of equal standing with the NT, for Pinnock and Callen affirm that Jesus never regarded the OT as an immutable truth for succeeding generations, but required relativizing for new covenant believers.⁵⁹ For this reason, critics of prosperity teaching hold that the OT should only be used typologically or as an analogy for contemporary readers.⁶⁰ Osborne regards the OT as an allegory requiring present day readers to ascribe an appropriate meaning to the text, so the meaning of the OT is regarded as different for NT and contemporary believers.⁶¹ On this basis, then, it would not be appropriate to apply OT texts directly to present day Christians without some degree of reinterpretation, involving the identification of the types and analogies displayed and how they should be applied.

In one example Hagin quoted Joshua 1:8 regarding a declaration of the law as a means of achieving success and prosperity.⁶² Furthermore, Hagin demonstrated that this principle could not be exclusively old covenant for he quoted a similar theme in 1 Tim 4:15 where Paul advocated meditation as an aid to success and personal prosperity. However, he made no mention of the revised 'law' one may be meditating on under the new covenant. The problem is more apparent when he referred to Isaiah 55:8-9 declaring that the human mind cannot comprehend the thoughts of God.⁶³ But the case is altered for NT believers for shortly thereafter Hagin recorded what he perceived to be God's message on the work of the Spirit in revealing God's purposes.⁶⁴ So, in applying Isaiah 55:8-9 to his readers he appears to make some attempt to adjust the teaching accordingly.

⁵⁸ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 223.

⁵⁹ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 68-9.

⁶⁰ Farah, *Pinnacle of the Temple*, 20-1; Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 88.

⁶¹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 329.

⁶² Hagin, *Godliness is Profitable*, 23.

⁶³ Hagin, *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 55.

⁶⁴ Hagin, *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 57.

Hermeneutical Aspect 8 – The Spirit and Interpretation – There is considerable debate over the role of the Spirit in interpretation of Scripture as represented by what is termed Pentecostal or renewal hermeneutics, regarded as having a valuable contribution to make in this area, but which Vanhoozer believes to be over-rated.⁶⁵ For Pentecostal believers it would be coherent to conclude that it is the Spirit that is associated with deriving significance.⁶⁶ It is also concluded from this study that such implications inspired by the Spirit will fall broadly within the purview of the author's intention. This is particularly applicable where the Spirit inspires deeper meanings in the transition from OT to NT.⁶⁷ Yong believes that this process is further advanced by the involvement of the human imagination inspired by the Spirit.⁶⁸ With the wide variety of possible interpretations thus produced, it is the role of the community to authenticate such interpretations.⁶⁹

With Hagin, as with most prosperity teachers, there is a greater reliance upon the Spirit's illumination than any other aspect of the hermeneutical strategy. There is perceived to be a personal sense of leading by the Spirit in keeping with general Pentecostal theology and an expectation that he will make the believer aware of divinely inspired significance. For example, Hagin taught on the principle of sowing and reaping from 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 and Galatians 6:7-9.⁷⁰ Here he identified the Spirit's involvement in sowing and reaping but perceived that the Spirit's illumination equated sowing with giving gifts and doing so generously. In another example Hagin quoted Mark 11:23 where Jesus taught on speaking to mountains.⁷¹ He then went on to teach on the importance of confession, for he saw the significance of speaking to mountains as a clear reference to speaking to obstacles in the believer's life. Hagin apparently relied on the illumination of the Spirit for this application but for his readers, however, this might not be so clear.

Regarding 3 John 2 Hagin concluded that material prosperity depended on spiritual prosperity, going on to picture the prosperous soul as exemplified in Psalm 1:1-3.⁷²

⁶⁵ Vanhoozer, 'Reforming Pneumatic Hermeneutics', 21.

⁶⁶ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23.

⁶⁷ Marshall, 'Introduction', 16.

⁶⁸ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 222.

⁶⁹ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 248-9; Vanhoozer, 'Reforming Pneumatic Hermeneutics', 18-19; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 275-310.

⁷⁰ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 218-9.

⁷¹ Hagin, *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 26, 39.

⁷² Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 9-10.

Some commentators as described in §5.3.2. are surprised that the mild introductory greeting of 3 John 2 could be so widely adopted as one of the most often quoted prosperity scriptures. To them this seems to be unwise hermeneutics, but it is more likely to be a ‘contemporary inspiration’ of Scripture to quote Pinnock.⁷³ For Hagin there was little conscious attention given to the Spirit’s illumination, but he simply appeared to repeat the illumination received, only occasionally acknowledging the work of the Spirit in the process. Moreover, in quoting Psalm 1 as a description of the prosperous soul, he perhaps implies the Spirit’s role in making the connection not explicit in the scriptures themselves.

Conclusion to Hagin’s Hermeneutical Appraisal – Hagin’s interpretation of Scripture adheres to the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 in some aspects but not in others, for he gave attention to the author’s intent only for the Pauline epistles but for other scriptures it was not significantly in evidence. So far as the meaning/significance divide is concerned, so usefully derived by Hirsch, he appeared to agree with it and used it in his interpretation but did not acknowledge its use in so doing.

He showed a marked preference for the Authorised Version of the Bible, only in his final work using a range of translations for clarification. The absence of his allowance for genre would be a serious deficiency in Hagin’s hermeneutics, for he showed almost no overt recognition of this aspect in his writing. On the contrary he resorted to a ‘contractual hermeneutic’ so deplored by the critics. This is of course dismissed by serious scholars of hermeneutics but prosperity teachers hold the view that Scripture is the miracle volume inspired by the Spirit, and assert that Scripture may function in this way. His disregard for historical context cannot but weaken his interpretations also.

Hagin infrequently used the OT and when he did, he applied it directly to believers without adjustment for genre, historical or covenantal context. He appeared not to be seeking types and analogies to be applied to contemporary believers. As a Pentecostal believer Hagin would clearly expect the Spirit’s illumination in interpreting Scripture. Although he would not have put it in these terms he was well acquainted with Spirit-inspired significance, regarding the Spirit’s illumination as a major feature of his hermeneutics. He also appeared to adopt the pneumatological imagination as a strong

⁷³ Pinnock, ‘Spirit in Hermeneutics’, 3-4.

feature of his interpretation.

4.2.4. Kenneth Copeland (b. 1937)

Introduction – Kenneth Copeland has drawn much from both Hagin, the Word-faith prosperity teacher, and from Roberts, with his seed-faith teaching. Copeland produced three books on prosperity, written between 1973 and 2011.⁷⁴ The most recent of these offers a unifying theme of prosperity from the Garden of Eden to the present where ‘the blessing’ represents divine provision to believers. Copeland’s prosperity teaching forms this section summarising his major tenets whilst §4.2.5. evaluates his hermeneutical methodology as compared to the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3.

His Teaching - Kenneth Copeland notes that the first man was created by God in his image to have dominion over the whole world (Gen 1:26-7).⁷⁵ God also imparted something of himself to Adam. The Garden of Eden was perceived to be a place of blessing being beautiful, prosperous, merry and in fact the best.⁷⁶ God had spoken a blessing over the man and the woman (Gen 1:28), commanding them to multiply and fill the earth making it glorious.⁷⁷ Copeland sees the task given to humans as restoring the earth, making it like Eden.⁷⁸ Genesis 1:28 represents, for him, a declaration that human beings were to rule the earth as confirmed by John 10:34,⁷⁹ fulfilling their God-given commissioning with authority over their circumstances. Kenneth Copeland perceives that the human race was and is in rebellion against God because of the fall, a catastrophe for the natural world and for humanity,⁸⁰ whereby the earth came under the devil’s rule (Gen 3:14-19).⁸¹ He asserts that because of Adam’s dominion the curse spread throughout the natural realm.⁸² Yet he teaches that Jesus removed the curse (Isaiah 53:4-6), so people were redeemed from it in their lives.⁸³

Kenneth Copeland refers repeatedly to Abraham as the model for God-given prosperity through the covenant (Gen 12:1-3).⁸⁴ He also notes that Abraham’s faith

⁷⁴ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity; Blessed to be a Blessing; Blessing of the Lord*.

⁷⁵ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 41-44.

⁷⁶ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 51.

⁷⁷ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 51-2.

⁷⁸ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 53.

⁷⁹ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 54-55.

⁸⁰ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 67-69.

⁸¹ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 67-69, 76, 79.

⁸² Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 80.

⁸³ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 84.

⁸⁴ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 93-95; *Understanding Prosperity*.

pleased God, being regarded as righteousness in his sight (Rom 4:3-4).⁸⁵ So Copeland affirms that God made Abraham very rich,⁸⁶ and the blessing upon Abraham turned the land of his sojourning into ‘the Garden of the Lord’ (Gen 13:10).⁸⁷ Copeland teaches that the blessing includes dominion, abundance and the ability to bless others.⁸⁸ For the believer, however, salvation means being born again as an heir of the blessing and a channel of blessing to others.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Copeland claims that God always honours his word, representing the final authority for believers.⁹⁰

Kenneth Copeland recommends simply asking God to meet one’s needs (Isaiah 1:19, Mark 11:24, James 4:2),⁹¹ but rejects asking other people for anything (Rom 13:8, Phil 4:19).⁹² He also makes the point that acting upon God’s word brings forth a plentiful supply (Mark 4:3-20).⁹³ He suggests a lifestyle of giving, where ‘seed’ will come up miraculously by a means not known to the giver (Mark 4:26-32).⁹⁴ He adds that motive is important, ensuring that giving is only as directed by the Lord.⁹⁵

The principle Kenneth Copeland teaches is that God is to be the ultimate source of the believer’s financial provision (2 Cor 9:8),⁹⁶ and he recommends laying up treasure in heaven (Matt 6:19-34),⁹⁷ involving making proper deposits in one’s heavenly bank account for use later.⁹⁸ He suggests doing this through tithing, giving to the poor (Prov 19:17), financing the preaching of the gospel (Mark 10:29-30), or simply, as a praise to God (Ps 118:1-4).⁹⁹ Withdrawals may be made by making the request in agreement with one’s spouse (Matt 18:19), taking hold of the required sum by faith (Mark 11:23-4) and binding the devil and his forces (Mark 16:17, Jas 4:7).¹⁰⁰ The

⁸⁵ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 93.

⁸⁶ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 97.

⁸⁷ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 97.

⁸⁸ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 228.

⁸⁹ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 230; *Giving and Receiving*, 5.

⁹⁰ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 236.

⁹¹ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 25-6.

⁹² Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 7; *Blessing of the Lord*, 22.

⁹³ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 110; ‘Dream On’, 2-5.

⁹⁴ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 57, 103, 104, 110; *Laws of Prosperity*, 90; Roberts, *Miracle of Seed-Faith*, 17-37.

⁹⁵ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 113, 123; Copeland, ‘Don’t Hang the Curtains, Hang the Rod’, 2-5.

⁹⁶ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 26.

⁹⁷ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 67.

⁹⁸ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 74.

⁹⁹ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 77, 81, 83, 85.

¹⁰⁰ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 102-3.

asking should be specific and in faith (Mark 11:24, John 16:23).¹⁰¹

Believers are often in debt or in fear of lack, but Kenneth Copeland recommends resisting fear, trusting God for financial provision by casting cares on God and resisting the devil (1 Pet 5:7),¹⁰² whilst holding on to the image of a positive outcome. As exemplified by Jairus' attitude regarding his daughter (Mark 5:25-29), Copeland teaches that one must resist fear, remembering that believers are redeemed from its curse (Gal 3:13).¹⁰³ Copeland agrees with Hagin that poverty is not a virtue, for the blessing of God supplies one plentifully (Deut 28:11-12), whilst poverty is classified as a curse (v.15).¹⁰⁴ Copeland sees poverty as destructive of people's well-being.¹⁰⁵ He concludes that debt is no solution to poverty (Rom 13:8) challenging one never to borrow again,¹⁰⁶ for believers can come boldly to God confident that he has defeated debt.¹⁰⁷

Kenneth Copeland's teaching alleges two financial systems, God's system, ('the blessing'), based upon faith, trust and generosity and the worldly system (Babel or Babylon) based on debt, confusion and ultimately robbery.¹⁰⁸ Copeland observes that one cannot serve God and money (Matt 6:24),¹⁰⁹ so money cannot be the believer's source of security. For Copeland, this means transferring one's trust from the secular system to God's provision.¹¹⁰ He perceives worry as part of the secular cursed system which believers must avoid. Word-faith believers are neither ascetic nor indulgent, since there can be no reliance on material objects for one's fulfilment.¹¹¹ Accordingly, he regards God's system of finance as meaning that a person does not have to work for a living necessarily, but may trust God for his or her personal or ministry needs.¹¹²

Kenneth Copeland also identifies spiritual conflict as likely for those committed to 'God's financial system', where tithing is a tangible statement of commitment to it.¹¹³ He notes that the patriarchs demonstrated these principles, especially Abraham and

¹⁰¹ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 174-5.

¹⁰² Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 263-5.

¹⁰³ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 267-76.

¹⁰⁴ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 45.

¹⁰⁵ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 89-91; Copeland, *How to Become Debt Free*.

¹⁰⁷ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 358.

¹⁰⁸ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 333-40.

¹⁰⁹ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 337.

¹¹⁰ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 337-8; Copeland, 'God's Wisdom – Your Priority', 18-19.

¹¹¹ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 349.

¹¹² Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 349.

¹¹³ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 102.

Melchizedek, where tithing demonstrated Abraham's commitment that only God would make him rich (Gen 14:18-24).¹¹⁴ The blessing of God's perceived system would be released by faith where unbelief would stop the flow of blessing.¹¹⁵

Overall Conclusion - Kenneth Copeland adds a dimension to the analysis of Hagin's views, suggesting an additional component of prosperity teaching based on the application of *wisdom* to the believer's financial arrangement. Such wisdom suggests that one should avoid debt, and by implication that one should save for projected needs, whilst also planning for a surplus for charitable donations at the level appropriate to the individual.

4.2.5. Kenneth Copeland – Appraisal of Hermeneutical Methodology

Hermeneutical Aspect 1 - Scripture Principle - Kenneth Copeland shows agreement with the Scripture principle expressing his trust in the authority of Scripture and drawing texts from many parts of the Bible with equal trust in their relevance for believers. For example the promise of blessing from God is drawn from Genesis 1, 3, and 12, Isaiah 53 and John 10, all taken to apply to contemporary believers.¹¹⁶ Also, as Pinnock and Callen write, an adherence to the Scripture principle should not result in too confined a view of a legitimate interpretation or application,¹¹⁷ and this would appear to be a principle which Copeland uses to its fullest extent.

Hermeneutical Aspect 2 - Author's Intent - As introduced in §3.3.2. and referred to in §4.2.3., Hirsch regarded the author's intent as the starting point for sound interpretation. However, Copeland's teaching makes little reference to the author's intended meaning. For example Copeland quotes Matthew 18:19 to support the importance of the husband agreeing with the wife over making 'heavenly withdrawals', whereas the human author's intent was to stress the importance of agreement within the church community.¹¹⁸ This was not raised in Copeland's discussion of treasure in heaven. Also, when referring to Mark 11:23-24 the author's purpose would be to communicate the power of faith for the believer, which Copeland reasonably believes is broadly in line with applying faith for finance. He also acknowledges the resistance of the devil as suggested by the 'mountain moving'

¹¹⁴ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 98-102.

¹¹⁵ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 160.

¹¹⁶ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 41-55, 67-79, 84.

¹¹⁷ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 14; Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 41-55, 67-79, 84.

¹¹⁸ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 102-3.

discourse.¹¹⁹ This could then be regarded as a moral interpretation which, as Vanhoozer advises, must be faithful to the author's intent.¹²⁰

Hermeneutical Aspect 3 – Meaning/Significance – As agreed by numerous hermeneutical scholars, the core meaning of a text may be invariable, but will have diverse implications or significance.¹²¹ In this regard, when Copeland traces the restoration of 'the blessing' back to Genesis 12 and 13, the significance he draws becomes far removed from the original meaning. Genesis 12:1-3 described the promised blessing of one man and his descendants with the prospect of all families on earth being partakers of it.¹²² Therefore it would not be unreasonable to see significance for NT and contemporary believers in this text, especially since Paul clarifies the issue declaring that those who are in Christ are Abraham's offspring (Gal 3:29). Copeland also quotes Romans 4:3, 14, where Paul teaches that Abraham's faith was reckoned to him as righteousness.¹²³ Copeland therefore legitimately takes this text to signify for believers that faith in Christ makes them righteous before God. Therefore, in general, Copeland extends the significance well beyond the author's apparent intent but not perhaps beyond its reasonable significance.

However, Kenneth Copeland's teaching of two specifically financial systems is based in part on Matthew 6:24 on the impossibility of serving God and Mammon.¹²⁴ Copeland's two system teaching may not be clearly supported by Scripture and is perhaps an application whose significance moves beyond the limit of reliable interpretation. This is despite Hirsch's and Osborne's encouragement to accept significance not envisaged by the authors of these scriptures.¹²⁵ If this were regarded as an illumination of the Spirit, as suggested by Yong, it remains as yet unconfirmed by the broader Christian community.¹²⁶

Hermeneutical Aspects 4 - Selection of Texts - In this regard, Kenneth Copeland selects widely distributed scriptures, as for example in his treatment of 'fear, debt and poverty' where his texts include references to Deuteronomy, a gospel and several

¹¹⁹ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 174-5.

¹²⁰ Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text*, 81.

¹²¹ E.g. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1-13; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23.

¹²² Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 93-5.

¹²³ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 93.

¹²⁴ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 337-8.

¹²⁵ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 103-26; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23.

¹²⁶ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 221-30.

letters.¹²⁷ He does therefore make a reasonable attempt to give the view of the whole Bible, as recommended by Perriman.¹²⁸ He is also convincing in showing the continuity from OT to NT, particularly with what he terms ‘the blessing of God’, seeing it as a unifying and continuing theme from Genesis 1:28 through OT and NT even to the present day.¹²⁹ It must be born in mind, however, that so far as the critics are concerned their works were published twenty or more years prior to the publication of *The Blessing of the Lord*, and in this work the view of the whole Bible is certainly more apparent than in his earlier works.

Hermeneutical Aspect 5 – Use of Translations – Kenneth Copeland has long trusted in only the Authorized Version. In his 1974 publication, it is the only version consulted.¹³⁰ With his 1997 publication he also included references to the Amplified Bible, a favourite of Gloria Copeland’s.¹³¹ Finally, with the 2011 publication, he adds references to the New King James Version and the New International Version.¹³² Thus, he has broadened the range of versions consulted to include versions with varying degrees of equivalence as also recommended by McCartney and Clayton.¹³³

Hermeneutical Aspect 6 – Genre and Historical Context – Although Cotterell and Turner recommend allowance for genre and historical context, this is an area to which Kenneth Copeland gives little attention.¹³⁴ It is probable that he is so focussed on discovering the unifying themes in Scripture that he overlooks the distinct differences and modes of expression characteristic of each genre. Any oversight may also be because of the ‘contractual hermeneutic’ which he is accused of subscribing to. For example, in addressing the issue of asking and receiving, Copeland quotes verses from Isaiah, a gospel and an epistle with no reference to their distinctive genre or application (Isaiah 1:19, Mark 11:24, James 4:2).¹³⁵ So these verses are taken to have direct application to contemporary believers, which may lead to some level of misunderstanding.

Hermeneutical Aspect 7 – OT in NT – The transition from OT to contemporary

¹²⁷ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 45, 263-76, 358; *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 11, 89-91.

¹²⁸ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 84.

¹²⁹ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 41-95.

¹³⁰ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 2.

¹³¹ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 2.

¹³² Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 2.

¹³³ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 179-80.

¹³⁴ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 99.

¹³⁵ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 25.

believers means that OT scriptures are often non-literal for them. So the interpretation of the OT will involve the use of typology, analogy and allegory.¹³⁶ Moreover, the transition from OT to NT, which Kenneth Copeland usually apparently neglects, would seem to offer plentiful opportunities for deriving the *sensus plenior* for new covenant believers.¹³⁷ However, in the process McCartney and Clayton emphasize that the original human meaning must not be violated.¹³⁸

However, Kenneth Copeland does show some regard for typology, noting in Genesis 14:18-24 after the arrival of Melchizedek that the blessing was at work in Abraham's life. Here he takes Melchizedek to symbolise Christ whereas Abraham symbolises all those who will have faith like his.¹³⁹ Copeland also directly applies Genesis 1-3 to contemporary believers.¹⁴⁰ His analysis of these passages makes no allowance for the continuity between OT and NT but rather is an expression of the simplistic contractual hermeneutic, as mentioned, whereby scriptures are applied directly to believers. So here, the blessing of Genesis 1 is seen as identical with the blessing of God for contemporary believers. So he declares that the blessing of Genesis 1 promised an empowerment to prosper also applicable today. This would surely be an over-simplification.

Hermeneutical Aspect 8 – The Spirit and Interpretation – The debate concerning the Spirit's role in interpreting Scripture has led certain scholars to offer cautionary observations regarding it. Vanhoozer, for example, is unhappy with the Pentecostal community generating meaning for which they should rather be the recipients in his view.¹⁴¹ Atkinson also cautions that the Spirit's illumination should have a solid base of grammatico-historical hermeneutics.¹⁴² With this in place Stronstad perceives that the Spirit opens the mind to see more implications, which may indeed include elements of pneumatological imagination.¹⁴³

For Kenneth Copeland the illumination of the Spirit is a major component of his hermeneutic methodology which he uses to form clear doctrinal positions, sometimes based upon remote and unconnected scriptures. For example, his doctrine of two

¹³⁶ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 88; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 329.

¹³⁷ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 63, 67.

¹³⁸ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 169-71.

¹³⁹ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 100.

¹⁴⁰ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 41-4, 51-5, 67-80.

¹⁴¹ Vanhoozer, 'Reforming Pentecostal Hermeneutics', 21-2.

¹⁴² Atkinson, 'Second Look' 9.

¹⁴³ Stronstad, 'Lukan Pneumatic Hermeneutics', 12-15; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 222.

distinct financial systems is a development of his teaching on ‘the blessing’ and ‘the curse’ which is well supported by Scripture including the curse of Genesis 3 and the blessing of Genesis 12:1-3. Copeland then goes on to see an application of this teaching as applying to two distinct financial systems: one a manifestation of the curse and the other a manifestation of the blessing. As mentioned under *hermeneutical aspect 3* this may be an application too far representing a rigid formulation of two financial systems from scriptures that do not clearly support such a view and ought to be accompanied by some admission of the tentative nature of this interpretation not found in Copeland’s works. It clearly awaits the evaluation of the community of believers to add possible weight to its credibility.

Conclusion to Hermeneutical Appraisal – One of Kenneth Copeland’s strengths is his trust in the authority of Scripture for believers, but his method of applying Scripture to believers appears to make little reference to the human author’s intent. However, the meaning/significance distinction is fully supported by him, perhaps even beyond its reasonable application for contemporary believers. Copeland quotes scriptures from the OT and the NT with some appropriate techniques for applying the OT to contemporary believers, including the use of *sensus plenior* and typology. His method would therefore seem consistent with Dunn’s perception of validity in diversity, although he also on occasion will attempt to hang a whole teaching on one or two remote and apparently unconnected scriptures.

Copeland was very much attached to the Authorized Version despite the fact that its antiquated language will be misunderstood by some of his readers. Only recently he has begun using one or two other versions in his teaching, allowing him to take advantage of the valuable scholarship represented by the various translations. The main weakness of his hermeneutical methodology is the absence of any reference to genre or historical context in his interpretation of Scripture. In its place he presents a ‘contractual hermeneutic’ whereby he believes aspects of God’s dealing with humankind can come from any scripture directly. His approach appears to be to regard the patriarchs as participating in the new covenant though out of its due season. The illumination of the Spirit is probably his preferred hermeneutical tool, but the illumination of the Spirit appears not to be based upon the grammatico-historical foundation recommended by the scholars including Atkinson. So Copeland majors on the authority of Scripture, upon meaning and significance together with a substantial

reliance upon the illumination of the Spirit, but the reliability of his interpretations in general would be somewhat uncertain because of the lack of attention to genre and historical context.

4.2.6. John Avanzini (b. 1936)

Introduction - Avanzini is a prosperity teacher of the late twentieth century up to the present time. He was born in Paramaribo, Surinam, South America, but was brought up and educated in Texas, USA, before obtaining a PhD from the Baptist Christian University, Shreveport, Louisiana.¹⁴⁴

Prosperity is his main teaching subject, with books written between 1989 and 1995, representing an intense period of writing. His prosperity teaching covers three main propositions, firstly that God intends his people to be prosperous, especially for Christian ministry. Secondly, he teaches that there are principles or spiritual laws for receiving God-given prosperity involving giving and receiving with faith expressed through positive confession of Scripture. The third principle is that debt is often the devil's strategy for restricting the effectiveness of the believer's life and witness. Therefore believers should take energetic action to reduce debt whilst maintaining a positive expectation of miraculous debt cancellation.

As with the sections on Hagin and Kenneth Copeland this section summarises the major themes of Avanzini's prosperity teaching and §4.2.7. will evaluate his hermeneutical methodology in the light of the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3. Avanzini's three prosperity propositions are analysed as follows.

His Teaching - This is based on God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3),¹⁴⁵ in which God required obedience and faith, for which Abraham would be blessed with material blessings enabling him to become a blessing to others. Paul emphasized this story indicating that Christ's suffering on the cross enabled the impartation of the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles (Gal 3:13-14, 29).¹⁴⁶ Thus, Avanzini considers, because of God's covenant with Abraham, believers have authority to acquire wealth.¹⁴⁷ He also quotes examples of God-given prosperity even in hard times noting Isaac's plentiful crops under difficult conditions (Gen 26:1, 12-13) and the miraculous

¹⁴⁴ Biography of John Avanzini by In.com accessed from www.in.com/John-Avanzini, on 21st November 2012.

¹⁴⁵ John Avanzini, *The Wealth of the World* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1989) 38, 146, 160.

¹⁴⁶ John Avanzini, *Financial Excellence* (Hurst, Texas: His Image Ministries, 1993) 109, 120.

¹⁴⁷ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 23, 25.

provision for the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16).¹⁴⁸ The principle taught is that one should give away something needed but in short supply to receive a return. This is based on the principle of sowing and reaping (2 Cor 9:6),¹⁴⁹ also supported according to Avanzini by the promise of Moses that God gives the power to make wealth (Deut 8:18).¹⁵⁰ This he urges believers to confess repeatedly.¹⁵¹ The increase in wealth produced would enable believers to assist in promoting the gospel,¹⁵² suggesting accordingly, ‘God wants you wealthy.’¹⁵³

God’s grace may be directed to believers for ‘all sufficiency in everything’ and also for ‘an abundance for every good work’, meaning sufficiency for personal needs with generous donations for Christian ministry (2 Cor 9:8).¹⁵⁴ Wealth is not for luxury, he says, but for saving others’ ‘souls’.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, poverty is not regarded as being of God and should not be regarded as virtuous.¹⁵⁶ He further adds that being a poor person does not make one spiritual, for good people leave a financial inheritance for their children’s children which means they must have finances to leave (Prov 13:22).¹⁵⁷

Avanzini suggests that Christians should commit to regular and increasing giving whilst planning to give more as increase comes (Deut 8:18, Is 55:8, 9, Phil 4: 15-16, 3 John 2).¹⁵⁸ He emphasizes the importance of sowing when you reap and giving more as finances increase, as he sees taught by Jesus and Paul (Matt 13:8, 2 Cor 9:6-10).¹⁵⁹ Avanzini encourages an attitude of faith to ensure a successful outcome to one’s giving, best expressed in the form of positive confession (Mark 11:22-3). He suggests that the cancellation of debts may also be achieved through positive confession.¹⁶⁰ Avanzini projects an air of great confidence and certainty when he says that a return is guaranteed to the person who gives. Referring to Mark 4:20 and Luke 6:38, he assures believers that they will know prosperity in abundance, will make friends, and will

¹⁴⁸ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 28-29; *Financial Excellence*, 28.

¹⁴⁹ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 28.

¹⁵⁰ Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 28-32, 83, 89.

¹⁵¹ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 14, 20.

¹⁵² Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 33.

¹⁵³ Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 69; *Financial Excellence*, 106

¹⁵⁴ Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 51; *Financial Excellence*, 129-30.

¹⁵⁵ Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 56.

¹⁵⁶ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 132, 140-143; *Wealth of the World*, 23.

¹⁵⁷ Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 78.

¹⁵⁸ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 127-130.

¹⁵⁹ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 72, 74, 92, 108, 119, 121.

¹⁶⁰ John Avanzini, *God’s Debt Free Guarantee* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1994) 39-44.

meet great people as well as increasing the spreading of the gospel.¹⁶¹ He offers negligible cautionary notes as to possible impediments in receiving financial returns and simply affirms that believers should be in an attitude of faith. He also teaches that one must believe one will receive in order to do so (Mark 11:24) and to expect the miracle of God-given increase (1 Cor 3:6).¹⁶²

The background to this teaching is that Avanzini sees debt as a huge problem in today's society. Avanzini regards debt as a trap which is far too easy to fall into.¹⁶³ He perceives it as causing anxiety and contributing to divorce and unhappiness, so recommends Christian couples should cast their anxieties on the Lord (1 Peter 5:7).¹⁶⁴ His advice is to strenuously avoid debt,¹⁶⁵ for interest devours wealth and, with some organisation, this could be avoided.¹⁶⁶ Avanzini warns believers not to tolerate increasing debt as a solution to financial difficulties, deceiving themselves and manifesting unbelief and double-mindedness.¹⁶⁷ The hermeneutical justification of the principle of miraculous debt cancellation will be considered in §4.2.7. This is an important consideration in view of the protests of those critical of prosperity teaching. For Avanzini would point out examples of miraculous debt cancellation in the miracles of Elijah and Elisha for widows suffering significant privation and in one case being heavily in debt (1 Kings 17: 7-16, 2 Kings 4:1-7).¹⁶⁸

Avanzini applies Deuteronomy 8:18 to debt, where God gave Israelites the power to acquire wealth,¹⁶⁹ also claiming that a hundredfold return is achievable for believers who give. Further, he is convinced of an end-time wealth transfer where the wealth of the wicked is transferred to the righteous (Prov 13:22).¹⁷⁰ Although challenged by his critics, he points out that such wealth transfer was frequently the way the patriarchs acquired wealth, as with Abraham (Gen 12:16-20, 13:2, 14-15).¹⁷¹ Isaac also sowed and reaped a hundredfold whilst Jacob became wealthy despite Laban's attempts to rob him (Gen 26:3 & Ch. 29-32). Here Avanzini demonstrates the useful technique of

¹⁶¹ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 128-136; *Financial Excellence*, 76.

¹⁶² Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 131.

¹⁶³ John Avanzini, *War on Debt – Breaking the Power of Debt* (Hurst, TX: His Image Ministries, 1990) 23-30, 37-42.

¹⁶⁴ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 51-59.

¹⁶⁵ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 61-74.

¹⁶⁶ John Avanzini, *Rapid Debt Reduction Strategies* (Hurst, TX: His Image Ministries, 1990) 16-21.

¹⁶⁷ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 83-91.

¹⁶⁸ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 103, 121.

¹⁶⁹ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 157.

¹⁷⁰ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 170-178.

¹⁷¹ Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 87, 90.

supporting an isolated proverb with examples from the lives of the patriarchs. Thus, Avanzini views poverty not as a virtue, nor does it make a person spiritual. He encourages the effective use of faith for financial improvement, being also convinced that debt must be carefully managed and avoided if at all possible.

Conclusion for Avanzini – His teaching that God intends believers to be prosperous is based upon the covenant with Abraham, supported by Paul’s writings on this matter (Gen 12:1-3, Gal 3:13-14, 29). Thus he infers that the application of this covenant should give the believer confidence in financial matters, especially if a generous giver, because the grace of God is imparted for *all sufficiency* as well as a plentiful supply for good works. Avanzini expresses great certainty that such generous givers will not lack abundant divine provision. He also advocates caution with regard to debts, for increasing debt would be contrary to God’s desire for the individual. He sees debt as a trap, not as a wise solution to overcome lack. He also concludes that God may well be moved to assist those genuinely seeking to extricate themselves from excessive or unwise debts.

4.2.7. John Avanzini – Appraisal of Hermeneutical Methodology

Hermeneutical Aspect 1 – Scripture Principle – Avanzini adheres to the Scripture principle, believing it to be the final authority on matters of faith and Christian doctrine as also supported by Pinnock and Callen.¹⁷² Accordingly, he apparently regards the whole Bible as important, using a balance between the OT and the NT references, for from Avanzini’s seven books studied the balance of scriptures appears to be 164 OT to 205 NT. This is consistent with the balanced hermeneutic proposed by Treier.¹⁷³ However, in this process the historicity and particularity of the scriptures quoted is not generally considered as Yong would recommend.¹⁷⁴

Hermeneutical Aspect 2 – Author’s Intent – As Cotterell and Turner advise the interpretation should take due note of the author’s intent in the writing of Scripture, where the interpretation may vary but not be inconsistent with it.¹⁷⁵ However, Avanzini gives little consideration to the author’s intention which Hirsch and Thiselton recommend.¹⁷⁶ Instead, he tends to draw upon the meaning of the words

¹⁷² Pinnock & Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 11.

¹⁷³ Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 200.

¹⁷⁴ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 102.

¹⁷⁵ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 100.

¹⁷⁶ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 231-3; Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 13, 37, 127.

applied without considering their meaning or context for the original author. For example, Avanzini quotes 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 quite often, supporting giving, with a view to receiving funds returned to give again.¹⁷⁷ But there is no reference to the author's intent as suggested by the context of fundraising for the church in Judea, or of Paul's purpose in writing thus to the Corinthians. Moreover, the abundance described in verse 8 does not appear to be in evidence either among the Corinthian or Macedonian believers, or even in Paul's own life and experience. Thus, the teaching based in part on this passage represents something apparently beyond the author's intention or experience. However, the words of verse 8 in particular do seem to give teaching on abundance for ministry perhaps at odds with the author's general perceived intent. Therefore, perhaps these words themselves ought to be allowed to modify what is perceived to be the author's intent.

In addition, Avanzini quotes 1 Corinthians 3:6 in support of his sowing and reaping teaching, but the author's intent here was for increase in terms of spiritual and church growth, so that no person would boast.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, although God may well give financial increase, this would not be in keeping with the author's intent and would probably represent an inappropriate interpretation. At least there should be some reference that increase in one area may well signify increase in other areas also.

Hermeneutical Aspect 3 – Meaning/Significance – As widely agreed by hermeneutical scholars, based on the work of Hirsch, Scripture is regarded as having a core meaning with a diverse range of implications.¹⁷⁹ Avanzini teaches that God intends abundance for his children and advocates giving and receiving as the way to achieve this. He quotes Deuteronomy 8:18 supporting the view that God gives the power to make wealth.¹⁸⁰ The apparent meaning he gives is that prosperity is a covenant matter with God and not an optional extra. However, it is not clear from his treatment that this promise transfers without change from the old covenant to the new. Regardless of this distinction, Avanzini gives the significance for contemporary believers that God is with them in their strategies to acquire increase. He therefore advises from the phrase 'make wealth' that this involves human initiatives that God will bless, including regular donations to fellow believers and Christian ministries.

¹⁷⁷ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 119, 129, 147-51; *Principles of Increase*, 12-23.

¹⁷⁸ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 131.

¹⁷⁹ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 103-26; Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 500; Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 72-3.

¹⁸⁰ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 127-30.

Also Avanzini refers to 2 Kings 4:1-7 implying that the miracles of Elisha have special significance as a type for Spirit-filled followers of Jesus as supported by Luke 4:18-27. However, this point needs to be made clearly, so that Avanzini's readers may have more confidence in applying this passage to their own lives and experience. Avanzini also quotes 3 John 2 in the same context of financial increase which has the initial sense of a wish or a sentiment that Gaius, the recipient, would prosper, including financially.¹⁸¹ The significance suggested is that prosperity would come in abundance because of prosperity of the soul. However, the problem for Gaius was that he was generous and therefore probably rightly considered as prosperous of soul but financially drained because of his generosity. So the abundance promised by Avanzini had not come to Gaius automatically. If Avanzini's teaching is true then something more is required for the believer to access it. This same scripture is quoted in another work, where Avanzini makes it clear that prosperity of the soul is indeed associated with generosity, so he draws the perceived significance that personal prosperity is its direct result.¹⁸² Avanzini, therefore makes much of this verse deriving its significance well away from the text quoted (see §5.2.2. for a further discussion of 3 John 2).

Hermeneutical Aspect 4 – Selection of Texts – This aspect of the considered hermeneutical strategy requires the view of the whole Bible to be taken into consideration in forming the scriptural interpretation.¹⁸³ Yet, as Dunn has suggested texts from different parts of the Bible will have different standing as the basis for doctrine and where OT texts are quoted, the continuity from OT to NT must be established.¹⁸⁴ In the books of Avanzini studied there is a wide selection of texts from OT and NT with about 45% of them from the OT. However, there is little evidence of treating OT scriptures more cautiously for contemporary believers than those from the NT as implied by Dunn. Indeed, Avanzini appears to subscribe to the simplistic 'contractual hermeneutic' whereby any scripture may be regarded as being of direct application to such believers. This means his observations from such scriptures should be regarded with caution.

Hermeneutical Aspect 5 – Use of Translations - Avanzini does not use a significant range of translations to enable different shades of meaning to be revealed, contrary to

¹⁸¹ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 129.

¹⁸² Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 79, 83.

¹⁸³ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 84.

¹⁸⁴ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 26, 100-1.

McCartney and Clayton's view that this gives the best scholarship available providing valuable insights.¹⁸⁵ However, the translations with more dynamic equivalence may lose the translation of the individual words, for McQuilkin claims that the individual words are also inspired.¹⁸⁶ So Avanzini has shown a decided preference for the Authorized Version, with occasional references to a more modern translation displaying dynamic equivalence, such as The Living Bible of 1971.

Hermeneutical Aspect 6 – Genre and Historical Context – Osborne quotes Rene Wellek and Austin Warren who identify genre as '... a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (... or structure) and also upon inner form ...' based on subject and audience.¹⁸⁷ Therefore each genre has its own appropriate mode of interpretation. However, it is observed by Cotterell and Turner that the rules of interpreting different genres are often intuitive and not clearly defined by interpreters.¹⁸⁸ Thus for Avanzini, as with other prosperity teachers, the allowance for genre may well be intuitive. For example, when teaching on the benefits of giving he quotes a gospel, Luke 6:38, suggesting that giving sets the measure God uses to bless believers.¹⁸⁹ Also, he quotes Mark 4:20 and 10:29-30 to illustrate multiplied returns on the believer's generosity.¹⁹⁰ In another example Avanzini teaches on the importance of tackling debt applying 2 Kings 4:1-7 on Elisha and the widow in debt and 1 Peter 5:7 on casting one's cares on the Lord with no modification for the different genres represented.

Hermeneutical Aspect 7 – OT in NT and for Today – As Osborne observes the OT was greatly respected by NT believers being almost their only Scripture, and so contemporary believers ought also to show respect for it.¹⁹¹ This is not a problem for most prosperity teachers who regard the OT generally as of equal importance to the NT. However, as Osborne points out, the OT's application is often allegorical and this needs careful consideration.¹⁹² Furthermore, as McCartney and Clayton explain the typology used can produce a legitimate *sensus plenior* if the text's place in God's

¹⁸⁵ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 179-80.

¹⁸⁶ McQuilkin, *Understanding the Bible*, 9, 113-24.

¹⁸⁷ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 181.

¹⁸⁸ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 99.

¹⁸⁹ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 133-6.

¹⁹⁰ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 135; *Financial Excellence*, 74.

¹⁹¹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 323.

¹⁹² Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 329.

redemptive plan is borne in mind.¹⁹³

When Avanzini teaches on his doctrine of ‘end-time wealth transfer’, where the wealth of the wicked is transferred to the righteous, he quotes an isolated proverb (Prov 13:22) to support this principle.¹⁹⁴ It is of course the nature of Proverbs to present isolated fragments of wisdom, needing exemplification from the patriarchs which he accordingly gives both in this and in others of his books. He quotes examples of wealth transfer in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses demonstrating this principle (Gen 12:16-20, 13:2, 14-15, 26:38 & chs.29-32).¹⁹⁵ So the proverb is legitimately supported by examples of OT patriarchs, but its NT and contemporary application remain unaddressed without NT examples of its implementation.

In another example of the transition from OT to NT Avanzini teaches on miraculous debt cancellation which he introduces with reference to the phrase, ‘... there is nothing too hard for (the Lord)’ (Jer 32:17).¹⁹⁶ Although this phrase is non-specific to his theme, he then goes on to support it with references to examples from Scripture showing God’s intervention in cancelling debt with reference to Elisha and the widow (2 Kings 4:1-7), the restoration of the borrowed axe-head (2 Kings 6:5) and Nehemiah’s reforms to cancel debt among the returned exiles (Neh 5:1-12).¹⁹⁷ His teaching then shows the same principle at work in the gospels where the temple tax owed by Peter was miraculously provided through a fish with a coin in its mouth (Matt 17:24-27). This then establishes the principle that miraculous debt cancellation is of appropriate significance for contemporary believers also.

Yet he draws scriptures from a range of genres with minimal attention to the transition from OT to NT and beyond and ignores typology, concluding that OT scriptures have direct application to material provision. To Perriman this appears to be an unwarranted disregard for the genre of the scriptures in question,¹⁹⁸ and he reasonably concludes that the significance of the scriptures used would be somewhat removed from the OT authors’ intended meaning. This makes the interpretation less secure according to Treier and Thiselton.¹⁹⁹ So Avanzini takes advantage of the

¹⁹³ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 167.

¹⁹⁴ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 170-8.

¹⁹⁵ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 172-6; *Wealth of the World*, 87-95.

¹⁹⁶ Avanzini, *Debt Free Guarantee*, 18.

¹⁹⁷ Avanzini, *Debt Free Guarantee*, 19-26.

¹⁹⁸ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 92.

¹⁹⁹ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 134; Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 13.

allowance for alternative interpretations, but may have taken it too far.

Hermeneutical Aspect 8 – The Spirit and Interpretation – In the debate over the Spirit's role Vanhoozer observes that Pentecostal scholars use the author's meaning as the basis for the Spirit's illumination on the text in question.²⁰⁰ However, Archer and Pinnock perceive God's purposes in Scripture to be at least in part beyond the intellect of the human author.²⁰¹ This may well fall therefore in the province of *sensus plenior* which Pinnock declares to be equivalent to Spirit-inspired significance, described by him as 'contemporary inspiration'.²⁰² However, the scope for perceiving deeper meaning is far more significant with the transition from OT to NT.²⁰³

Accordingly, when Avanzini quotes 1 Kings 17:8-16, the Spirit-inspired significance appears quite far removed from the author's intent.²⁰⁴ The deeper meaning which the Spirit may well have inspired involves the importance of giving as a prerequisite for receiving divine provision. There would therefore be a Spirit-inspired significance in terms of avoiding the potentially negative impact of the widow's despondent words which Avanzini believes the prophet sought to forestall in his instruction to her. One can also perceive a Spirit-inspired significance when Avanzini quotes Philippians 4:15-16 showing that the promised provision of verse 19 was based on the Philippians previous generosity.²⁰⁵ This is described as fruit that abounds to your account confirming this significance.

It is also unlikely that the author of Mark's gospel could have conceived the extent to which Mark 11:22-24 has been applied to concepts probably well beyond the author's understanding, experience or intent. For Avanzini, one emphasis, which one perceives to be the Spirit's illumination, is the aspect of focussing one's words on a desired outcome (v. 23).²⁰⁶ He takes this, together with verse 24 as providing a strategy of adding faith to spoken declaration, encouraging his readers to believe they receive the desired outcome in line with their words.²⁰⁷ This is his perception of Spirit-inspired deeper meaning, which has gained some credibility among the Pentecostal community,

²⁰⁰ Vanhoozer, 'Reforming Pneumatic Hermeneutics', 19.

²⁰¹ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 252; Pinnock, 'Spirit in Hermeneutics', 18.

²⁰² Pinnock, 'Spirit in Hermeneutics', 3-4.

²⁰³ Marshall, 'Introduction', 16.

²⁰⁴ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 28-9.

²⁰⁵ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 127-30.

²⁰⁶ Avanzini, *Debt Free Guarantee*, 39-44.

²⁰⁷ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 131.

as suggested by Yong.²⁰⁸

Overall Conclusion to Hermeneutical Appraisal – Avanzini's hermeneutics show reasonable compliance with some attention to the author's intent and with considerable reliance on the significance of scriptures extending it to a considerable degree. There is substantial reliance upon the illumination of the Spirit, but often without the grammatico-historical basis recommended as a foundation for such Spirit-inspired significance. Also, the important aspects of the author's intent, the logical transition from OT to NT and proper reference to genre or historical context are not referred to significantly. Whether the Spirit's illumination, which Avanzini appears to draw upon, can be successfully received without due reference to these aspects is a matter of conjecture, but a clear, comprehensive and coherent prosperity doctrine is nonetheless achieved with the tacit belief that their absence can be adequately compensated for by the Spirit's illumination.

4.2.8. Jerry Savelle (b. 1946)

Introduction – Born into a farming community in Vicksburg, Mississippi, Savelle, brought up as a Baptist, later attended Louisiana Tech University in Ruston.²⁰⁹ Savelle describes his early association with Kenneth Copeland through whom he became a believer in 1969 and with whom he ministered for some years.²¹⁰ In his later books distinct emphases of his own have emerged, in addition to the importance of joy, including the heavenly grant, the prayer of petition and the favour of God.²¹¹

His Teaching – Savelle teaches that Christians may discover their blessings only through Scripture, for people are 'destroyed through lack of knowledge' (Hosea 4:6).²¹² So he encourages a resolute determination to discover and believe what Scripture teaches despite persecution or delay in the fulfilment of its promises (Mark 4:17).²¹³ More specifically, the word of God is perceived to be like seed, with sowing and reaping at the centre of Word-faith prosperity teaching. Savelle, like Kenneth Copeland, refers to the Garden of Eden noting that seed was God's second gift to

²⁰⁸ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 275-310.

²⁰⁹ Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 13, 19.

²¹⁰ Savelle, *Can't Steal Your Joy*, 29; Jerry Savelle, *Are You Tired of Sowing Much and Reaping Little?* (Crowley, TX: Jerry Savelle Ministries, 1995) 18.

²¹¹ Jerry Savelle, *Prayer of Petition: Breaking Through the Impossible* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2011); *Favor of God*.

²¹² Savelle, *Can't Steal Your Joy*, 25.

²¹³ Savelle, *Can't Steal Your Joy*, 15.

humanity after the command to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:26-29).²¹⁴ Therefore he declares work should not be a means of income but rather to provide seed. His teaching from 2 Corinthians 9:6 is that the level of the sowing decides the level of reaping.²¹⁵ However, in so teaching, the seed has changed from being ‘the word’ and has become a financial or material donation. So, it is unclear whether the seed is the word of God or money (Mark 4:3-20).²¹⁶ Savelle also encourages believers to face challenges with joy, speaking Scripture to change their circumstances (Josh 1:8, 2 Chron 20:14-25, Job 5:22, Jer 33:11).²¹⁷ Indeed, he assures believers that maintaining joy will cause the devil to restore whatever he has stolen (James 1:2),²¹⁸ as a seven-fold return (Prov 6:30-1).²¹⁹ The devil’s attempts to steal one’s goods must be resisted by being strong in faith (Mark 4:15, John 10:10).²²⁰

Savelle teaches believers to stand in faith without fainting (Luke 18:1-5, Eph 6:14, Rom 10:8), systematically applying this until it becomes a lifestyle (Rom 3:27, 2 Cor 4:13),²²¹ for faith pleases God (Heb 11:6).²²² God himself is seen as a role model for exercising faith (Rom 4:17),²²³ as also suggested from the cursing of the fig tree, where Jesus calls upon his disciples to have faith in God (Mark 11:13-4, 20-3).²²⁴ For Savelle, sowing seed does not guarantee a harvest, for good soil is essential (Mark 4:3-8).²²⁵ However, the determining factor for harvest is unclear, whether it be the seeds one sows (2 Cor 9:6) or the soil in which it is sown.²²⁶ But sowing much and reaping little should cause believers to consider their ways,²²⁷ advising that a lack of ‘harvest’ may be caused by bad behaviour, bitterness or unforgiveness (Mark 11:25-6, Heb 12:15, Eph 4:31).²²⁸ Thus cleansing the heart is required,²²⁹ to reap in due season.²³⁰

More Recent Developments in Savelle’s Teaching - Savelle teaches, based on Matthew

²¹⁴ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 27.

²¹⁵ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 33.

²¹⁶ For further discussion on this point see §4.2.9. – *Genre and Historical Context* for Savelle.

²¹⁷ Savelle, *Can’t Steal Your Joy*, 45, 79, 85, 88; *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 200.

²¹⁸ Savelle, *Can’t Steal Your Joy*, 38, 40-47.

²¹⁹ Savelle, *Can’t Steal Your Joy*, 47.

²²⁰ Savelle, *Can’t Steal Your Joy*, 7, 15.

²²¹ Jerry Savelle, *Honoring Your Heritage of Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1994) 12.

²²² Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 14-16.

²²³ Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 19.

²²⁴ Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 21.

²²⁵ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 22-3.

²²⁶ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 33.

²²⁷ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 33-34.

²²⁸ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 39-42, 49.

²²⁹ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 47, 52.

²³⁰ Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 96.

6:20 and 19:21, that treasure may be deposited in heaven,²³¹ and subsequently withdrawn from this heavenly storehouse.²³² He perceives that withdrawals require a specific request to God, a prayer of agreement with another believer and a declaration that God will indeed provide the money.²³³ Savelle has later developed the theory of the *heavenly grant* including the *prayer of petition* which may be presented to God for legitimate needs,²³⁴ and can be assured of a favourable response from God.²³⁵ Favour implies something granted out of good will, a gift bestowed or preferential treatment,²³⁶ being for our success and giving glory to God.²³⁷ God's favour is expected wherever one continually pursues God,²³⁸ and it brings increase, promotion and restoration of what the devil has stolen (Ex 3:16-22).²³⁹

Conclusion to Savelle – Much of Savelle's interpretation appears logical and coherent, even though greatly developing a minor aspect of the gospel. He emphasizes the *prayer of petition* and *the favour of God* as major teachings. Regarding the legitimacy of his interpretation, the significance he identifies has certainly gone far beyond the intention and understanding of the authors. Thus, it remains to be seen in §4.2.9. if his hermeneutics meet the strategy derived in chapter 3. In general, it would appear that Savelle's position is that Scripture supports the concept of believers expecting God's intervention in the improvement of their financial wellbeing. In support of that view he perceives that God has revealed the principles of financial blessing in his word which believers ignore to their own detriment. Moreover, he proposes that the word is a seed which is sown through declaration which has a certain unspecified link with generosity in terms of financial donations. He also quotes primarily OT scriptures to illustrate the power of faith-filled confession when facing spiritual enemies. These principles, then, are deemed to ensure that faith is expressed appropriately and that the believer may reap in financial prosperity. He therefore gives advice on the receipt of the favour of God and on how to present requests for a God-given heavenly grant for a specific purpose.

²³¹ Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 208-15.

²³² Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 225-33.

²³³ Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 225-8.

²³⁴ Savelle, *Prayer of Petition*, 38-9, 95, 171.

²³⁵ Savelle, *Prayer of Petition*, 183-4.

²³⁶ Savelle, *Favor of God*, 19-24.

²³⁷ Savelle, *Favor of God*, 30.

²³⁸ Savelle, *Favor of God*, 133-48.

²³⁹ Savelle, *Favor of God*, 151-55.

4.2.9. Jerry Savelle – Appraisal of Hermeneutical Methodology

Hermeneutical Aspect 1 - Scripture Principle – Savelle clearly applies the Scripture principle taking the view of the whole Bible, as supported by Pinnock and Callen.²⁴⁰

For example, in investigating the concept of declaration of Scripture he draws supporting texts from Joshua, 2 Chronicles, Job, Jeremiah, Proverbs, Mark, John and James.²⁴¹ Also his adherence to Scripture is not so strict as to rule out alternative but consistent interpretations.²⁴² However, the human dimension of the authors concerned is seldom remembered or taken into account when forming an interpretation.²⁴³

Hermeneutical Aspect 2 – Author's Intent – This is generally regarded as the legitimate basis for interpretation as presented by Hirsch.²⁴⁴ Therefore, as mentioned, a prosperity teacher would be justified in drawing attention to the varying aspects of the interpretation, but not inconsistent with his understanding of the author's purpose in writing the scripture concerned, as acknowledged by Cotterell and Turner.²⁴⁵ When Savelle quotes Hebrew 11:6, he perceives the meaning that faith pleases God.²⁴⁶

When he quotes a gospel, however, there is the added complication that there is the meaning of the human author as well as the meaning of Jesus' teaching which may well transcend the perceptions of the human author of the text. For example, Savelle refers to Mark 11:13-14, 20-23 on speaking to mountains, whose meaning is far from obvious to the human author.²⁴⁷ So, Savelle's teaching appears to explore the Saviour's meaning in saying that the believer's faith can be applied to both physical and spiritual impediments to one's prayers and ministry. In a similar vein Savelle quotes Romans 4:17, declaring that God calls things which are not as though they were.²⁴⁸ What Paul perceives to be God's way of speaking to things not yet existent is then taken by Savelle to be an example for believers to follow, something probably beyond the author's intent, but not necessarily inconsistent with it (see Rom 4:24). In general, Savelle does not make any specific reference to the author's intent but his teaching facilitates applications of the scriptures involved not inconsistent with their perceived meaning.

²⁴⁰ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 11.

²⁴¹ Savelle, *Can't Steal Your Joy*, 7, 15, 41, 45, 47, 79 & 85; *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 200.

²⁴² Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 199-200.

²⁴³ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 14; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 102.

²⁴⁴ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 231-3; *Aims of Interpretation*, 146-58.

²⁴⁵ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 100.

²⁴⁶ Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 14-16.

²⁴⁷ Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 21.

²⁴⁸ Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 19.

Hermeneutical Aspect 3- Meaning/Significance – Hermeneutics scholars declare that there should be just one core meaning to a text but it may well have a range of applications.²⁴⁹ In Savelle's works he quotes scriptures with an obvious meaning in, for example, a parable, but with significance he perceives to have received for his readers. When he gives an explanation for the parable of the sower from Mark 4:13-20, the context is obviously an agrarian one where seed produces varying returns so that sowing does not guarantee a harvest.²⁵⁰ However, the application is given in terms of sowing the word and of Satan's attack upon it. What is not taught from the parable, and what is not immediately apparent to the reader of this parable is what sowing the word implies and what fruit it produces at thirty, sixty or one hundred fold. Savelle draws its significance as sowing and reaping financially without any connection with the meaning of sowing the word. Furthermore there is a proposed association between sowing and the word which is not explained and neither is the connection between the word and giving which he proposes. That is not to say that such connections cannot be legitimately made since this parable is taught by Jesus as being the key to all parables (Mark 4:13), but to justify the interpretation Savelle needs to show how and why these connections may be made.

Savelle's interpretation of the parable does find confirmation in the financial/material application of sowing and reaping by Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:6.²⁵¹ Here, the context is known to be providing for the needs of the saints, so Savelle has drawn significance without reference to the parable of the sower, showing from Paul's words that sowing money should produce a harvest of finance. Another reference which Savelle makes is to Hebrews 12:15, again with agrarian connotations.²⁵² The meaning is the role of the grace of God in avoiding resentment and 'a root' of bitterness, but the significance drawn is that a failure to draw upon the grace of God will interfere with one's harvest or fruitfulness. The link between bitterness and failed harvests is tenuous at best. It may be a legitimate teaching in general, but the application cannot be readily made from this scripture. It might be somewhat more convincing as an application from the parable of the sower (Mark 4:19).

Hermeneutical Aspect 4 – Selection of Texts - Savelle takes the view that any scripture

²⁴⁹ E.g. Thiselton, *Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 500; Osborne *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23, 349.

²⁵⁰ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 22-3.

²⁵¹ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 33.

²⁵² Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 41-2.

may be a potential teaching point. Indeed, Savelle draws his texts on the importance of ‘the word’ from Genesis, the prophet Hosea and Mark’s gospel, although Dunn advises that not all scriptures have the same standing.²⁵³ On the topic of positive confession, much more emphasis is placed on OT texts with much less NT support. However, sufficient NT texts are quoted to make it of possible contemporary application. His topic of applying faith to produce a harvest is based entirely upon NT texts making it more assured as a contemporary biblical topic.

Hermeneutical Aspect 5 – Use of Translations – Despite McCartney and Clayton’s advice that much value is gained by referring to a range of translations, all Savelle’s early works used only the Authorized Version.²⁵⁴ There is occasional reference to the New American Standard Bible and the Amplified Bible, but post 2000 his works quote the New King James Version, the New International version, the New Living Translation, the New Testament in Modern English, and the Living Bible and The Message.²⁵⁵ McCartney and Clayton’s advice of 1994 on the use of a range of translations has been followed latterly.

Hermeneutical Aspect 6 – Genre/Historical Context – Much hermeneutics places an emphasis on the grammatico-historical analysis as the basis for interpretation, and as Atkinson observes, even when the illumination of the Spirit is given a significant place in interpretation, such grammatico-historical considerations ought to form the basis for it.²⁵⁶ However, with Savelle, as with the other Word-faith prosperity teachers, there is no significant recourse to genre or historical context. For example, Savelle, following the pattern of Copeland his mentor, traces the origins of his prosperity teaching to Genesis 1:26-29.²⁵⁷ Here, he quotes perceived divine revelation that ‘seed’ was one of God’s first gifts to humankind. The exposition is clear, but there is no reference to the genre or type of literature Genesis 1 represents. If others are to evaluate the teaching then this must surely involve reference to the type of literature quoted and how it may legitimately be applied. This scripture is clearly referring to actual seed with a view to growing more food, but the application would probably be allegorical, with an association with seed sowing as taught or implied by NT texts (2 Cor 9:6-10). For example, as mentioned in *Hermeneutical Aspect 3*, Savelle also teaches on sowing and

²⁵³ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 2, 6.

²⁵⁴ Savelle, *Can’t Steal Your Joy*, 4; *Reaping Little*, 15; *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 2.

²⁵⁵ Savelle, *Prayer of Petition*, 6; *Favor of God*, 4.

²⁵⁶ Atkinson, ‘Second Look’, 9.

²⁵⁷ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 27.

reaping from Mark 4:3-8.²⁵⁸ Here the genre is a parable which requires specific hermeneutical analysis. The seed referred to in this passage is the ‘word of God’ (Mark 4:13), so this aspect would require special interpretation with regard to the context of seed for the sower, which it does not receive. Finally, the sowing and reaping teaching is further taught from 2 Corinthians 9:6, where the genre is an epistle of much more direct application to the reader.²⁵⁹ The conclusion perceived is that Savelle has minimal regard for genre or for its implications, leaving his reader to draw his or her own conclusions on what exactly is a legitimate biblically-based form of giving or sowing.

Hermeneutical Aspect 7 – OT in NT and for Today – The OT was greatly respected by NT believers and this was because it was their canon. However, it must be remembered that not all of the OT has NT application.²⁶⁰ For Pinnock and Callen there is an advantage in stepping back to view the spiritual whole during interpretation.²⁶¹ Indeed, the OT should often be viewed typologically, which can often produce a legitimate *sensus plenior*, if placed clearly in God’s redemptive plan.²⁶² Savelle is perfectly happy to draw texts from the OT but any transition from OT to NT is assumed rather than clearly specified. Indeed, his ‘simplistic contractual hermeneutic’ comes into play in this area causing Savelle to regard OT and NT alike as the potential basis for the contract or agreement between God and the human race. For example he quotes Joshua 1:8 as a support for speaking out the word.²⁶³ He takes this text and equates it with positive confession for contemporary believers. This may be true, but it may simply refer to reciting the law before the people to keep it in their minds. No such possibility is considered by Savelle, and this text appears to have been taken as a word for contemporary believers to keep speaking Scripture as an aid to prosperity. Savelle also quotes 2 Chronicles 20:14-25 as another example of declaration of Scripture in the days of Jehoshaphat.²⁶⁴ This, however, was in the context of military warfare whose successful outcome brought increased prosperity for Israel. But to take this as a model for NT positive confession as a means of achieving financial prosperity needs explanation as to how it serves as a model for contemporary

²⁵⁸ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 22-3.

²⁵⁹ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 33.

²⁶⁰ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 323; McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 173.

²⁶¹ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 63, 68.

²⁶² McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 167.

²⁶³ Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 200.

²⁶⁴ Savelle, *Can’t Steal your Joy*, 79.

believers. For example, the explanation must include how believers transfer the scenario to spiritual opponents, how they should encounter them and how faith should be exercised regarding it. The picture of praise leading to victory is compelling, but the contemporary believer would benefit from reassurance as to how it fits their lives. That is not to say that it is an inappropriate model, for it may be perceived to have powerful benefits when wisely and prudently implemented.

The other texts he quotes from the OT echo the theme of singing words of faith to one's spiritual opponents, suggesting that one should laugh at shortage and expect joy to return (Job 5:22, Jer 33:11).²⁶⁵ However, the principle of material blessings in the OT is well known, but how these blessings translate to the contemporary believer is precisely the issue that those investigating prosperity teaching desire to understand, and it is also this very issue that the Word-faith prosperity teachers studied fail to elucidate with any clarity.

Hermeneutical Aspect 8 – Spirit and Interpretation – In seeking the Spirit's illumination of Scripture Spawn recommends looking for the intersection of Scripture with the experience of the translator.²⁶⁶ Therefore, it is concluded that the Spirit inspires varying interpretations of Scripture where different experiences produce different points of intersection with it.²⁶⁷ This particularly applies when interpretation involves analogies which are common to people's experiences and may therefore be more relied upon.²⁶⁸ However, Yong points out that pneumatological imagination leads to new applications distinct from one's traditions.²⁶⁹

The significance of this is that new applications of texts may justifiably be perceived as the author's experience relates to the analogy of Scripture. For example, when quoting Luke 18:1-5 on the unjust judge, Savelle relates this to his own experience in praying, demonstrating the need for persistence as well as faith. This is, perhaps, the deeper meaning which he perceives that the Spirit inspires, suggesting that believers should react to obstacles in their lives by persistence and determination not to accept its continuance.²⁷⁰ Savelle also quotes Paul's analogy in Ephesians 6:13-14 of the

²⁶⁵ Savelle, *Can't Steal your Joy*, 45, 85.

²⁶⁶ Spawn, 'Biblical Testimony and Experience', 4.

²⁶⁷ Pinnock, 'Spirit in Hermeneutics', 7.

²⁶⁸ Pinnock, 'Spirit in Hermeneutics', 5.

²⁶⁹ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 223-4.

²⁷⁰ Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 9-10.

Roman soldier equipped with his armour and standing firm in conflict.²⁷¹ Savelle then draws the application that exercising faith persistently will produce deliverance and success. Finally, he compares Romans 3:27 with 2 Corinthians 4:13, seeking to demonstrate a distinction between the ‘law of faith’ in the former with the ‘spirit of faith’ in the latter, interpreting the former in a negative way with the latter as more desirable.²⁷² This may appear to be an illumination of the Spirit, but in this instance it is more likely to be coloured by his experiences with his two different daughters, perceived in their school days to be motivated by ‘law’ in one case and by ‘spirit’ in the other. So this would probably be a misrepresentation of Paul’s intent.

Conclusion to Hermeneutical Appraisal – Savelle gives some attention to the author’s intent, but moves well beyond it in applying it to contemporary believers. He makes full use of the concept of drawing contemporary significance from the surface meaning of the texts he uses. His teaching is also well supported by a widespread selection of texts from all parts of the Bible.

Overall, then, as with the other Word-faith prosperity teachers studies, Savelle majors on the Scripture principle and the formation of significance for contemporary believers, associated with texts from most areas of Scripture. The teaching which emerges is not therefore based on odd texts but is presented as a unified prosperity theme that can be traced from the beginning to the end of Scripture. There is, however, negligible regard for the author’s intent, for genre and historical context and for the transition from OT to NT. Finally, Savelle relies significantly on the Spirit’s illumination resulting in the formation of Spirit-inspired significance often well removed from context of the texts in question. There are, of course, weaknesses in the hermeneutics used by Savelle, but there may be sufficient adherence to Scripture and its Spirit-inspired significance to warrant acceptance of most aspects of his teaching.

4.3. Overall Conclusion to Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers

This section reviews the response in general of the Word-faith prosperity teachers selected for analysis and evaluation, to most of the aspects of the considered hermeneutical strategy devised in chapter 3. Firstly, with regard to the *Scripture principle* it is apparent that all four of them strongly affirm this principle, relying upon the authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and doctrine. Furthermore, to a greater

²⁷¹ Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 9.

²⁷² Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 12-14.

or lesser extent the Word-faith prosperity teachers regard all aspects of Scripture as important and relevant to their teaching.

Regarding the *author's intent*, there is little reference or consideration for this matter, except perhaps for Hagin who did show evidence of consideration of Paul's purpose in writing those epistles referred to. Kenneth Copeland and Avazini make little reference to the author's intent whilst Savelle does give a little attention to the meaning of the saviour in the gospel account and also has some sensitivity to Paul's meaning in some of the epistles quoted. However, in general, the author's meaning or intent is not a significant aspect of any of their hermeneutics.

There is very little overt reference to the *meaning/significance* divide but nonetheless most of the Word-faith prosperity teachers appear to make use of this principle.

Kenneth Copeland has some regard for it and Avazini derives clear significance for contemporary believers with uncertain transfer from its original perceived meaning. The same lack of clarity from meaning to significance is also apparent in the teaching of Savelle with a lack of logical connection.

These prosperity teachers have been criticized for basing a teaching on just a 'handful' of scriptures, but taking the writings of these teachers as a whole there does appear to be widespread *selection of texts* from all parts of the Bible, demonstrating the validity in diversity proposed by Dunn, but for Savelle all scriptures are taken to have equal standing, contrary to Dunn's perceptions. With the exception of Hagin, these teachers also quote large number of texts from the OT in their teaching.

In the *use of translations*, all four teachers quoted appear to have a strong attachment to the Authorized Version using no other versions in those works published prior to 2000. It appears that the message finally got through to them that a more modern translation would assist their readers. So those with works post 2000 use a more modern translation with a variety of other versions in support. Not only does it make their message more understandable, but as McCartney and Clayton point out, this gives them the benefit of the expertise of all scholars involved in those translations.

For all the prosperity teachers analysed in this chapter there is little or no discernible allowance for *genre or historical context* in their hermeneutics. This is by far the most serious deficiency because there is no overt recognition of this aspect. In its place, all rely upon what Perriman describes as the crude or simplistic contractual hermeneutic

whereby all texts have apparently equal standing, any one of which may give certain aspects of the agreement between God and members of the human race. This itself relies upon an acceptance of the verbal inspiration of Scripture whereby every word in the original languages is deemed to be inspired. It is of course acknowledged that all of these prosperity teachers are very experienced in teaching from the word and the use of genre or historical context may be applied intuitively, but there is very little if any overt reference to this aspect of hermeneutics.

The *use of the OT in the NT and beyond*, is also a much neglected aspect of Word-faith hermeneutics for, as Kay perceives, one weakness is that prosperity teaching is only perceived to be possible if the difference between the OT and NT is ignored.²⁷³

Accordingly, the possibility of inadequate hermeneutics here is apparent. Indeed, there is no significant attempt to apply OT scriptures using typology or analogy and indeed the OT is generally regarded as equally important as the NT and may be applied directly to contemporary believers, perhaps involving the spiritualizing of OT texts quoted. However, with regard to *the role of the Spirit in interpretation*, much is made of this aspect by the prosperity teachers quoted. Hagin, for example, is well acquainted with the Spirit-inspired significance of the texts quoted, also apparently making full use of the pneumatological imagination. For Kenneth Copeland the Spirit's illumination would be his preferred hermeneutical strategy for Spirit-inspired significance but with little attention to the Grammatico-historical foundation recommended by Atkinson. Avazini and Savelle also make much use of the Spirit's illumination.

The Word-faith prosperity teachers have a common strategy in their adherence to the Scripture principle and to the illumination of the Spirit. However, apart from Avanzini, they appear to lack theological education and tend not to give significant attention to the authors' intent in a wide-ranging selection of texts, nor to the genre of the scriptures quoted. For this reason, their interpretation appears highly individualised and selective, particularly where texts were extracted from their OT settings.

There are weaknesses in their hermeneutical approach, but not sufficient to render their interpretations null and void. Indeed, their respect for Scripture and their attention to the illumination of the Spirit may well enable the general principles of

²⁷³ Kay, *Pentecostalism*, 271.

their doctrines to be legitimate. Hence, in chapter 5 some of the principle prosperity doctrines are evaluated in terms of their hermeneutical appraisal and by comparison with contemporary commentators, who will undoubtedly apply a hermeneutical strategy similar to that of chapter 3.

Chapter 5 – Development of a Three Category Prosperity Theology

5.1. Introduction

This chapter builds on the hermeneutical evaluation of Word-faith interpretation in chapter 4 to develop a categorised classification for prosperity teaching. The principles that emerge from their interpretation of the primary scriptures involved are evaluated on the basis of the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 and their interpretation by contemporary commentators ranging from the nineteenth century to the present. It is considered that the commentators consulted formed their opinions using a thorough hermeneutic similar to the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3. This assertion is warranted as those quoted are well respected in their interpretation of Scripture, and express views that are perceptive and substantial, with works widely published and appreciated.

With regard to the stated aim of this thesis, the purpose is to derive a prosperity theology that takes full account of the ‘ideal’ considered hermeneutical strategy developed in chapter 3. To this end the strengths and weaknesses of the hermeneutics of the prosperity teachers, critics and commentators consulted are being assessed. This is the methodological approach or *process* being applied to this research, and as an outcome of this process *results* are produced which are deemed to be sound, hermeneutically. Accordingly, the prosperity teachings of the Word-faith prosperity teachers consulted thus far have been evaluated using a sound hermeneutical method. Then as a result those prosperity teachings which survive my evaluation are to be analysed and classified according to three central categories of my proposed prosperity theology, emerging from this thesis. As will be seen this classification will be formulated in the categories of *righteousness*, *wisdom* and *faith*. Therefore, the *process* of hermeneutical evaluation produces the *result* of my categorised prosperity theology emerging from the analysis of the findings.

Also, the evaluation of these themes produced by these Word-faith prosperity teachers will be justified in part by comparison with the interpretation of contemporary commentators. Where this process justifies the prosperity themes reviewed, this will be considered a valid interpretation, but, where they do not concur, this may be because commentators make no comment on these aspects or, less frequently, because there is direct conflict between the interpretation of Word-faith prosperity teachers and those of the commentators. In the former case, such teaching would be treated with

caution, being adopted carefully and advisedly, but in the latter case where some new interpretation or application may emerge this will be noted, recognizing that the verdict on this teaching will depend on the response of the Christian community, unless it violates generally agreed points of Christian doctrine.

5.2. – Prosperity Themes from Word-faith Prosperity Teaching

5.2.1. Introduction

The following themes emerge from Word-faith prosperity teaching and focus on the major prosperity concepts of their teaching used to formulate a three category prosperity theology.

5.2.2. Theme 1- The Principle of Prosperity

Introduction - This theme is most often supported by reference to 3 John 2, where Word-faith prosperity teachers perceive confirmation of this principle. It was quoted by Hagin, Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Avanzini and Savelle.¹

3 John 2

As Interpreted by Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – Hagin takes this verse to mean that for the contemporary believer financial and material prosperity are dependent on spiritual prosperity.² Kenneth Copeland regards this verse as having Spirit-inspired significance that God wishes to prosper believers and to do so ‘... by causing (the) *soul* to prosper.’³ For him, this means God will plant seeds or ideas in the mind that will produce prosperity. Avanzini also declares that the soul must prosper before material prosperity will manifest.⁴ Finally, Savelle also testifies to the illumination of the Spirit regarding this verse concluding that he has the right to expect to prosper because it is God’s will that he should.⁵ So prosperity of soul is central and would probably be demonstrated by generosity towards others. However, Gaius, to whom 3 John was written, was generous and had a prosperous soul, yet apparently was not prospering materially, so it must be concluded that generosity is not the only requirement.

Comments on Interpretation – It is difficult to perceive 3 John 2 as part of a prosperity

¹ Hagin, *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 32; *Midas Touch*, 1,9; Oral Roberts, *It’s Time to Get Out of Debt Supernaturally* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Evangelical Association, 1991) 2; Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 49; Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 79, 83; Savelle, *Can’t Steel Your Joy*, 17-19.

² Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 9.

³ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 49, italics in original.

⁴ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 83

⁵ Savelle, *Can’t Steal Your Joy*, 17-19.

teaching as intended by the author since it comprises nothing more apparently than an introductory sentiment or aspiration that its recipient should prosper. The letter is primarily for other purposes, to encourage Gaius' continuing work in hospitality. However, it does display the underlying belief or expectation that John advocated the principle of prosperity. The use of the word 'prosper' does reasonably imply material or financial well-being although this is contested by some commentators.⁶ However, the formation of a complete prosperity teaching based substantially on this verse would represent a significance, as taught by Hirsch, extending well beyond the core meaning, though admittedly not inconsistent with it.⁷

As to genre, the text forms part of a letter written in the church age and so it would be appropriate for direct application to believers. Nor is there an application of any particular OT themes in the use of this verse, making its interpretation more direct. 3 John 2 is one of the most frequently quoted prosperity scriptures, based on this brief introductory wish of well-being for its recipient, and those quoting it indicate that it is the illumination of the Spirit that has led to the wide adoption of the principle of prosperity as God's purpose for believers. As mentioned by Hagin (see §4.2.2.) the prosperous soul is illustrated with the picture from Psalm 1:1-3, where the Spirit's illumination apparently reveals one who delights in the law of God, meditating in it continually.⁸ As mentioned earlier in this section, Savelle also testifies that it is the illumination of the Spirit that has brought 3 John 2 to his attention as a potential prosperity scripture, causing him to conclude that it is indeed God's will for him to prosper.

However, there is apparently much more to the understanding of this matter, for the apostle John indicates in this verse that prospering spiritually is a necessary prerequisite to receiving material blessings. And with this the prosperity teachers quoted appear to agree, for, as mentioned, Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Avanzini and Savelle all teach that material prosperity is dependent on spiritual prosperity, and that the soul must prosper before material prosperity will manifest. So, it becomes necessary to establish the nature of prosperity of the soul, how it is acquired and the

⁶ These include Augustine and Montgomery quoted by Heather L. Landrus, 'Hearing 3 John 2 in the Voices of History', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11:1 (2002) 70-88, citing 72-3; David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011 [1988]) 191; John L. Anderson, *An Exegetical Summary of 1, 2, & 3 John* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics Inc., 1992) 249.

⁷ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1-13, 103-26.

⁸ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 9-10.

steps necessary for a believer to make the transition to financial and material prosperity. This will be further developed under ‘the blessing of Abraham’ (see §5.2.3.) and its application to new covenant believers. For such believers the spiritual blessings are rightly emphasized, because there is so much more in Christ of a spiritual nature, but with that in place the material implications of Christ’s work should not be ignored.

Support by Commentators - Landrus has assisted significantly, tracing any swing in the interpretation of this verse over the centuries.⁹ She notes that Augustine’s ascetic tendencies caused a distrust of increased material possession, seeking only to develop prosperity of the soul from 3 John 2.¹⁰ Yet Augustine’s response to 3 John 2 seems contrary to the author’s intent, since Gaius having a prosperous soul should seek material prosperity and health to facilitate his already commended good work. The emphasis, here, is not increased personal prosperity, but the facilitating of his ministry of hospitality, impaired by lack of funds. Moreover, it might reasonably be supposed that with this prosperity of soul Gaius would be unlikely to be beguiled by the love of money.

Landrus quotes Sumner who suggested in 1840 that physical health and financial success may be justly prayed for, whilst ensuring that it does not take precedence over concern for the soul.¹¹ However, as mentioned, it appears that the soul is key to success in this. Barnes challenges the ‘above all things’ translation as placing health and financial success above spiritual concerns.¹² But this appears to be an illogical conclusion, since the writer is observing a high degree of spirituality in the recipient, whilst health and material prosperity are limited. Indeed, the Authorised Version would suggest that one who has a prosperous soul ought to bring their health and financial provision up to an equivalent level. Montgomery, also quoted by Landrus, interpreted 3 John 2 in the early twentieth century with no reference to financial prosperity,¹³ emphasizing the importance of spiritual well-being as against physical health, despite the commentator being a leader of the healing revival of the later nineteenth century.

⁹ Landrus, ‘Hearing 3 John 2’, 70-88.

¹⁰ Landrus, ‘Hearing 3 John 2’, 72-3.

¹¹ Landrus, ‘Hearing 3 John 2’, 78-9.

¹² Landrus, ‘Hearing 3 John 2’, 79; Albert Barnes, *Notes: Explanatory and Practical on the General Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1854) 421-2.

¹³ Landrus, ‘Hearing 3 John 2’, 80.

Brown, born in 1928, interpreted 3 John 2, that John wished Gaius would be ‘well off’ and healthy even as his soul was ‘well off’.¹⁴ He regarded the phrase ‘above all’ as being ‘devoid of textual support’ and was caused by using a different Greek word at this text.¹⁵ But despite its potential loss, the resulting translation, ‘I wish in all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers’, is still a clear statement and a powerful encouragement to believe that God is also concerned for the material needs of the believer.

Brooke identifies a context relating to individual prosperity.¹⁶ Jackman agrees, suggesting that 2 and 3 John were written together, the first to the church and the second to an individual member of it.¹⁷ Furthermore, it was written to a generous man to encourage his services for travelling missionaries.¹⁸ But Jackman downplays the prosperity aspect of this verse interpreting it merely as wishing ‘that all may go well with you’, although, as he admits, a more direct translation would imply prosperity.¹⁹ He recommends a balance between the physical and spiritual requirements for the believer,²⁰ acknowledging that frequently the pendulum has swung to one or other of these extremes. Anderson suggests the verse refers to the recipient prospering ‘in every way’ or ‘in all respects’ as well as being healthy, implying this to be the most important prayer topic for Gaius (3 John 1).²¹ The expression ‘to prosper’ refers to financial prosperity as supported by Burdick, David Smith, Lenski and Stott, whom he quotes.²² The likely implication is that Gaius was spiritually healthy but possibly unwell and financially drained.

Prosperity Teaching Thus Substantiated – The hermeneutical evaluation together with the support of a sufficient number of commentators confirms the view that praying for financial prosperity is a worthy pursuit, especially for supporting Christian ministry. The concept of the *prosperous soul* has not received significant attention from the commentators, but prosperity teachers have regarded it as a reference to the spiritual well-being of the individual believer. Landrus identified one feature of the prosperous

¹⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1982) 703.

¹⁵ Brown, *Epistles of John*, 703-4.

¹⁶ A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957 [1912]) lxxxii.

¹⁷ Jackman, *John's Letters*, 190.

¹⁸ Brooke, *Johannine Epistles*, lxxxii-ii.

¹⁹ Jackman, *John's Letters*, 191.

²⁰ Jackman, *John's Letters*, 191.

²¹ Anderson, *1, 2 & 3 John*, 248-9.

²² Anderson, *1, 2 & 3 John*, 249.

soul as exemplified by Gaius that it is unlikely to be affected by the love of money. This would be important for those seeking prosperity, that they have the personal integrity to avoid seeking financial prosperity for its own sake, but to be a blessing to others. Further, from Gaius' example, Brooke concludes that prosperity of soul refers to generosity while trusting God for one's financial needs. This requires faith, especially when such generosity may be criticised by fellow believers. Jackman's call for balance between physical and spiritual needs constitutes another helpful concept from 3 John 2. For developing one's spiritual well-being, while neglecting the material requirements of life would be mistaken, whilst pursuing money and neglecting one's spiritual well-being would be disastrous for one's Christian walk and witness.

Regarding the prosperous soul, exemplified by Gaius, I have shown in this evaluation that it speaks of that characteristic of the believer who sincerely seeks God, who is generous, avoids the love of money and exercises faith in God's material provision as a result of his or her generosity. This therefore begins to suggest the need for Gaius to exercise faith in this area. As mentioned, this concept will be further developed in the study of 'the blessing of Abraham' in theme 2 (see §5.2.3.).

Theme 1 therefore shows hermeneutical support for certain principles which will form part of the proposed three category classification of legitimate prosperity theology to progressively emerge from the various prosperity teachers consulted. Firstly, with regard to *righteousness*, 3 John 2 reveals the importance of pursuing spiritual well-being as a priority so that the believer will not become preoccupied with financial prosperity and thereby become affected by the love of money. Concerning *wisdom*, a balance is required between the pursuit of physical and spiritual needs ensuring that seeking God takes first place. Also, the *prosperous soul* of 3 John 2 may refer to generosity, regarded as a prerequisite for receiving financial prosperity. This would be an issue of *faith*, representing a major prosperity teaching that the generous person may well prosper. This is faith because it requires trust in God that any shortage produced by generosity will be covered by the provision of the Lord. Also regarding *faith*, it would also be required to believe one receives before financial provision manifests. This, then, begins to suggest a potential prosperity theology with a three category classification.

5.2.3. Theme 2 – The Blessing of Abraham

Introduction – Almost without exception, Word-faith prosperity teachers draw upon God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) to provide a theological basis for God’s provision for believers’ financial needs. Their confidence in this rests upon Paul’s exegesis of this OT scripture (Gal 3:13-14, 29), whereby he assures that anyone who is ‘in Christ’ is a descendent of Abraham and an heir according to the promise (v.29). Paul devotes 24 verses to Abraham and so it could not be regarded as an isolated scripture. Moreover, it represents a well-documented and significant departure from the tendency to expect only spiritual blessings for contemporary believers.

Gen 12:1-3 - God’s Covenant with Abraham

As Interpreted by Word-faith Prosperity Teachers – Hagin apparently did not refer to Abraham using this passage, but did observe that he was ‘very rich’ following God’s covenant with him (Gen 13:2).²³ Kenneth Copeland notes from Genesis 12:1-3 that God-given prosperity comes through the covenant with Abraham.²⁴ Therefore, he sees Abraham as a model for receiving financial and material blessings from God by faith. Avanzini observes that the promises received by Abraham were for blessing, a land, a name and to become a nation. Abraham’s part in this agreement was to move home and to establish a new economic system based on God’s provision.²⁵ He also notes the important principle that Abraham was blessed to be a blessing to others.²⁶ Therefore, Avanzini regards financial and material provision as a covenant matter with God. Furthermore, Savelle believes God’s covenant with Abraham ensured both his natural and spiritual prosperity.²⁷ He observes that the blessing promised to Abraham was to be ‘blessed with abundant increase of favour’ as recorded in the Amplified Bible. In both Romans and Galatians Paul stated that this covenant precedes the giving of the law and therefore finds appropriate application for new covenant believers (Rom 4:13-16, Gal 3:17).

Comments on Interpretation of Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – Word-faith prosperity teachers interpret Genesis 12:1-3 with some regard for the author’s intent which may be considered as representing the commencement of the redemption of the human race through a man chosen by God, with apparent significance with reference to its future fulfilment in Christ. It is clearly perceived as being prior to the giving of

²³ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 6.

²⁴ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 93-5.

²⁵ Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 38.

²⁶ Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 146.

²⁷ Savelle, *Favor of God*, 53.

the law and therefore of all the more significance for NT and contemporary believers. This is confirmed by the NT reference to the blessing of Abraham in Galatians 3:13-14 and 29 where new covenant believers are regarded as the descendants of Abraham and therefore heirs of his blessing (see separate heading later in this section for consideration of the material dimension of the blessing of Abraham for NT believers). The teachers quoting this passage show minimal regard for the historical context but see significance of it as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Regarding genre and historical context, this passage has a clear historical setting in terms of the formation of the nation of Israel, with the added feature of God's words being directly recorded. The passage has legitimately been applied to people of faith, in contrast to those under the law. The validity of this is seen with regard to Romans 4:1-25 and Galatians 3:6-29 which supports the transition from OT to NT. Abraham is seen as an appropriate role model of faith for prosperity. The interpretation of the Word-faith prosperity teachers is therefore apparently justified in suggesting material blessings might also be legitimate for contemporary believers.

Support by Commentators - Westermann identifies a progression from the promise made to Abraham (v.2) to those he contacts (v.3a) then becoming a promise to all people (v.3b).²⁸ Therefore, this covenant was not only for Israel, but also for its communication to the whole world. The covenant is also applicable to all Christians, since Westermann declares, '...it is very unlikely that Abraham is meant in verses 1 and 4a, and only Israel in verses 2-3'.²⁹ Brueggemann credibly characterises the context of the promises to Abraham as barrenness, where God's power and the promise bring success and prosperity out of a poor situation,³⁰ but the improvement relies upon the obedience of the recipient. The implication he draws is that God causes to come into being that which does not exist (Romans 4:17), noting that the same principles applied in the time of Abraham, in the time of Paul and in the present time. The obedience demonstrated by Abraham is in the form of a dangerous, uncomfortable departure from the familiar, but this step is taken with the expectation of divinely inspired prosperity.³¹ He advises that his 'well-being, security, prosperity and prominence' could not be manufactured, but only given by God.³² Brueggemann

²⁸ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-26: A Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1986 [1981]) 146.

²⁹ Westermann, *Genesis 12-26*, 147.

³⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982) 117.

³¹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 118.

³² Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 119.

sees potential in the blessing of this one man for the blessing of a whole nation, enabling the application that any who position themselves correctly with regard to the promise may expect ‘considerable unforeseen potential to bless others’ and even whole nations.

Morris also regards Genesis 12:1-3 as constituting a call to leave one setting and to move out to a new one.³³ He sees the promised blessing as compensation for the disruption to his personal life. With this clear financial dimension, the legitimate application would be that operating financially God’s way may involve distancing oneself from the usual financial arrangements of contemporary society. Morris sees a messianic reference in these promises, but also the promise of security if one arranges one’s life God’s way. He sees these promises as applicable to Abraham himself and to the entire Jewish nation, so it would be reasonable to foresee financial blessings for Christians from this passage.

Conclusion to Genesis 12:1-3 – Savelle perceives that both material and spiritual prosperity are encapsulated in the blessing of Abraham, a combination also perceived to be implicit in the interpretation of 3 John 2. Scholars perceive the blessing of Abraham as being a blessing to a wider and wider circle of contacts around Abraham, including the Gentiles among its recipients. Commentators show that this blessing can transform barren situations into fruitful ones, and Romans 4:17 shows that believers may legitimately call things into being which do not currently exist, even as God himself did.

Two commentators see a departure as a prerequisite to the blessing of Abraham, where leaving one setting enabled the blessing of Abraham to manifest in a new location. For contemporary believers, this leaving may allegorically represent a departure from self-reliance and a commitment to the Lord as one’s source of supply. The issue would be a departure from reliance upon financial reserves as a security, relying instead upon God as one’s source, making such reserves available for charitable donations as the Lord may lead.

Galatians 3:13-14, 29 - Receiving the Blessing

As Interpreted by Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – This passage provides support for applying the blessing of Abraham to contemporary believers. Although Hagin does

³³ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976) 294-5.

not appear to quote Genesis 12:1-3 directly, he does make repeated references to these verses. Hagin sees that believers receive the blessing of Abraham as spiritual, physical and financial blessings, suggesting that like Abraham they should pay their tithes by faith and not according to the law.³⁴ In keeping with the blessing of Abraham, increased funds could be used to finance the sending of evangelists into the world. Hagin also observes from this scripture that believers are redeemed from the curse of the law which results in poverty, sickness and spiritual death, but since the curse is broken he assures believers that God makes them rich.³⁵ Kenneth Copeland similarly adds that believers are free from the curse and may receive such blessings from God.³⁶ These include health, victory, dominion and abundance. He affirms that believers should no longer be regarded as Gentiles because they have a covenant with God as part of Abraham's spiritual posterity. Savelle also teaches that believers are heirs of the promise (v.29) and that the blessing of Abraham ensures God's favour upon the lives of believers.³⁷ Avanzini similarly teaches that, as Abraham's seed, believers have supernatural power to get wealth.³⁸ He also notes that the land given to Abraham which was the means of his prosperity was also left to his natural seed and to his spiritual seed, which contemporary believers are.³⁹ Avanzini therefore believes that there will always be a means of creating income which God gives and blesses.

Comments on Interpretation of Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – The choice of OT and NT texts demonstrates their ongoing relevance for believers and reveals the continuity from OT to NT, for as Dunn observes the OT is foundational for the early church.⁴⁰ The author's intent in the Galatians passage is to show the relevance of the Genesis passage to Paul's readers, a significance probably well beyond the purpose of the author of the Genesis passage, though clearly not inconsistent with it as proposed by Cotterell and Turner.⁴¹ The significance of the Genesis passage is well portrayed by the Galatians passage where Abraham's faith shows, perhaps, how prosperity may be achieved. Paul reveals that the blessing of Abraham is for the believer. Therefore the interpretation of Hagin and Copeland appear legitimate, given this NT

³⁴ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 85-6.

³⁵ Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty*, 1, 10-11.

³⁶ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 183-4, 219.

³⁷ Savelle, *Favor of God*, 54.

³⁸ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 157.

³⁹ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 27, 92.

⁴⁰ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 100-1.

⁴¹ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 100.

interpretation of the OT scripture.

Regarding genre and historical context of the Genesis passage, Copeland in particular traces the theme of *the blessing* and *the curse* in a convincing manner from Genesis 1 to 11. It represents a historical and spiritual context where *the blessing* demonstrated in chapters 1 and 2 is lost in chapter 3 leading to the growing evil of murder, depravity and rebellion portrayed in chapters 4-11. Therefore the blessing of Abraham is legitimately portrayed as God's choice of another man through whom the blessing may be restored, culminating in Christ's sacrifice to break the curse for believers. Thus the genre of Genesis is given reasonable consideration as a historical passage with spiritual significance. The genre of the Galatian passage is a direct teaching of direct application to contemporary believers.

In the transition from OT to NT, as Osborne proposes, any allegory used in the OT passage may well have a different meaning for NT believers, for they can use the allegory or typology to ascribe different meanings than in OT times.⁴² However, no significant use of such typology is specifically applied by prosperity teachers and any such typology is assumed rather than clearly presented. Also, Word-faith prosperity teachers tend to apply such scriptures without any reference to their place in redemption history, or justification for their application to contemporary believers.

There is, of course, considerable evidence of the Spirit's illumination of Scripture in the Word-faith prosperity teaching, and Vanhoozer notes that Pentecostal scholars use the author's meaning as the basis for the Spirit's meaning.⁴³ However, there is little if any reference to the author's meaning as such and this connection is unlikely to be observed in their teaching. For these prosperity teachers there is heavy reliance upon the Spirit's illumination, but more an illumination of the text as it appears rather than any significant discernment of the author's intent. Therefore there are gaps in the evidence to support the veracity of the interpretation given other than its ultimate acceptance by the Pentecostal and more general community as proposed by Yong and Archer.⁴⁴

Support by Commentators –Referring to the removal of the curse by Christ, Barth

⁴² Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 329.

⁴³ Vanhoozer, 'Reforming Pentecostal Hermeneutics', 19.

⁴⁴ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 275-86; Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 213-4.

acknowledges that Christ thereby has set the believer free (Gal 5:1).⁴⁵ The reception of this blessing of Abraham by Gentiles is their inheritance as his spiritual heirs. Although this passage may confirm the reception of the blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Spirit, Longenecker suggests they may refer to the same blessing.⁴⁶ However, this appears illogical since Paul indicates that the promise of the Spirit and the blessing of Abraham are apparently imparted to potentially two different groups of people. Dunn suggests that it was the curse that ‘prevented the blessing of Abraham coming to the Gentiles’, so in Christ the obstacle to the blessings is removed.⁴⁷ He adds that the reception of the Spirit by the Gentiles is confirmation of God’s full acceptance of them through faith alone.⁴⁸ So, the reception of the Spirit would not appear to be equivalent to the blessing of Abraham.

Witherington claims that the blessing of Abraham means ‘inclusion of the nations in the people of God by faith’ involving the reception of the Spirit.⁴⁹ But he again falls short of an explicit description of the blessing of Abraham. Witherington suggests the Gentiles receive the blessing of Abraham while ‘we’ (the Jews), who apparently already had the blessing of Abraham, ‘receive the promise of the Spirit by faith’ (v.14). This, then, clarifies that the promise of the Spirit and the blessing of Abraham are different. Word-faith prosperity teachers give clarification from Genesis 12 on the blessing of Abraham, with minimal adjustment for difference of culture and covenant. This blessing, based on Genesis 12:1-3, constitutes land (v.1), many descendants and the resources to bless others (v.2). For contemporary believers this might be equivalent to a fruitful source of income, an influential position in society and the financial means to be a generous giver. No certainty attaches to this definition but ‘prosperity’ could well cover these blessings. The life of Abraham also demonstrates an influential figure who was not intimidated by his enemies (Gen 14:14-16) and, significantly, was insistent that only God would be permitted to make him rich (Gen 14:21-23).

Discussion of Material Dimension of the Blessing of Abraham as it Applies to New Covenant Believers -

⁴⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010 [1957]) 639.

⁴⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Bible Commentary: Galatians* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990) 123.

⁴⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (London: A & C Black, 1993) 176-8.

⁴⁸ Dunn, *Galatians*, 179.

⁴⁹ Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary of St Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1998) 240.

Thus far the blessing of Abraham has been seen as having both spiritual and material components. However, when it is applied to new covenant believers, some argue, as shown below, that it is the spiritual dimension only that is transferred to believers in Christ. It has also been demonstrated that in the case of Gaius in 3 John 2, he was displaying a prosperous soul as demonstrated in his generosity and his devotion to the Lord, but without any significant manifestation of material blessings to aid his ministry commended by the apostle. Moreover, in Galatians 3:13-14, Paul is assuring believers that the blessing of Abraham does come to Gentile believers because Christ has redeemed us from the curse. At first sight this may appear to some interpreters to be a blessing with a spiritual dimension only for new covenant believers.

In support of such a view Stott argued skilfully that "... the promised blessing includes justification (being put in favour with God), eternal life (being received into fellowship with God) and the 'promise of the Spirit'", with no reference to material blessings for new covenant believers.⁵⁰ This impression is further supported by the words of Paul in Ephesians 1:3, where he blessed God as the one who has 'blessed us with every spiritual blessings in the heavenly *places* in Christ' (NASB). The question then is whether this scripture implies spiritual blessings only for new covenant believers. Barclay concluded that this phrase described blessings for believers that God alone could give, including things such as goodness and peace of mind.⁵¹ Writing in 1999, O'Brien confirms that such a view is still current, declaring that these blessings include election to holiness, adoption as God's sons and daughters as well as redemption and forgiveness.⁵² However, he cautions that such spiritual blessings do not contrast with what is material. In addition, Robinson comments that OT blessings were primarily material whereas the blessings of the new covenant are spiritual.⁵³ In which case one must ask if the blessing of Abraham, as an OT blessing, being by his definition primarily a material blessing, can have any new covenant application. Yet Paul assured NT believers that the blessing of Abraham does come to them in Christ. So how, it might be asked, can the blessing of Abraham suddenly be transformed into

⁵⁰ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012 [1968]) 82-3, (Single quotation marks and brackets original).

⁵¹ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1966 [1956]) 89.

⁵² Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999) 95.

⁵³ J. Armitage Robinson, *St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: MacMillan & Co., Limited, 1907 [1903]) 20.

spiritual blessings only in the NT? It must therefore be concluded that the blessing of Abraham has always included spiritual blessings especially accessible in Christ.

In presenting an alternative view I have pointed out (§2.2.3) that God's covenant with Abraham included a reference to making him a blessing to others through the blessing received (Gen 12:2). So to whomever the *blessing of Abraham* is imparted it is reasonably concluded that its purpose will always be to make one a blessing to others. And this blessing for Abraham reasonably refers to being a material blessing, whilst the phrase '... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Gen 12:3 - NASB) would include the spiritual blessing dimension primarily including the redeeming work of Christ. Therefore the descendants of Abraham would expect God's material blessings, to be a material blessing to others. The words of John the Baptist in Luke appear to confirm this conclusion when he called for good fruit consistent with being children of Abraham (Luke 3:8-14). According to him, appropriate works for the children of Abraham include creating a surplus, sharing excess food and clothing, being honest in financial dealings, avoiding extortion and false accusation, being content with one's income, thereby standing clear of the love of money, all of which sounds remarkably similar to the provisions of the proposed prosperity theology developed in this thesis.

However, it must be acknowledged that John the Baptist's audience were still old covenant believers, for whom material blessings were to be expected, according to the view that only spiritual blessings are for new covenant believers. Yet if one continues with such a view, new covenant believers could only expect to be a blessing spiritually, for as mentioned, the *blessing of Abraham* passed on to new covenant believers was for the purpose that they could be a blessing to others. So it must be concluded, according to such a view, that new covenant believers are to bless others only spiritually with no practical dimension. However, this appears to be akin to James' criticism of those who offer verbal encouragement with no practical assistance (James 2:14-17). According to James, practical, material and financial assistance are appropriate works for new covenant believers to demonstrate their faith. Faith, therefore, with no practical outworking, even if accompanied by positive verbally expressed sentiment, has no value, for Manton of the nineteenth century, commenting on James 2:14-17, described such faith as 'faked' since it has no deeds.⁵⁴ As he

⁵⁴ Thomas Manton, *James* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995 [1870]) 145.

pointed out, the lack of attention to others' physical needs renders good words valueless.⁵⁵ The point of this passage is further clarified by McKnight who summarises it by concluding that faith without practical works is 'useless', 'cannot save' (2:14), 'is dead' (2:17) and is 'ineffective' (2:20).⁵⁶ Allison also confirms the inadequacy of faith alone where the complete lack of appropriate deeds accompanying it renders it completely absent.⁵⁷ He points out that James is not advocating salvation by works but asserting that saving faith cannot be devoid of practical assistance to others to be regarded as genuine faith.⁵⁸ This consideration, then, confirms this dimension of prosperity theology, where new covenant believers can legitimately demonstrate their faith in financial provision so that they can become a greater blessing to others. It is also interesting to note that James also identifies Abraham as an example of faith outworked practically (2:21-2).

Other writers in the NT convey a similar conviction of the essential nature of practical, material or financial assistance given to others, for John in his first letter declares that love without works is similarly deficient, advising that, if a believer has 'the world's goods and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?' (1 John 3:17-18 NASB). His conclusion, then, was to love '... in deed and truth.' Brooke, writing in the early twentieth century commented that the one who is unwilling to give of his material possessions, where the need is obvious, has not begun to develop true love in his soul.⁵⁹ True love therefore proves itself, he said, in action. Marshall agreed, declaring that a person is lacking in Christian love if he does not share with a fellow believer in need.⁶⁰ Accordingly, he sees John's call as an appeal for love in action, in keeping with the love shown by Jesus.⁶¹ Kruse agrees, commenting that John's readers could not 'close their hearts toward fellow believers in material need ... and still rightly claim that the love of God remains in them.'⁶² He adds that the love of God and meanness of spirit cannot

⁵⁵ Manton, *James*, 147.

⁵⁶ Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011) 232.

⁵⁷ Dale C. Allison, Jr., *James: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2013) 232.

⁵⁸ Allison, *James*, 426-34.

⁵⁹ Brooke, *Johannine Epistles*, 95.

⁶⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978) 195.

⁶¹ Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 196.

⁶² Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, (Leicester: Apollos, 2000) 137.

coexist, so that one must not just talk about love, but must practise it, relieving the needs of others.⁶³

Indeed, it can be seen in the gospel of Matthew that Jesus, too, calls upon believers to help practically and materially. Examples include giving alms (6:3), where Turner comments that giving to the needy is a duty for Jews and Christians. It is an appropriate act for those that 'sincerely love to serve God'.⁶⁴ Furthermore, gifts to the needy, if done unobtrusively should expect divine reward in the fullness of time.⁶⁵ Gundry agrees, noting that done secretly, giving will have its reward from God.⁶⁶ Morris also confirms that giving is connected and associated with reward from God, if genuine and sincere.⁶⁷ Moreover, Jesus teaches on letting the one who sues you for your tunic have your cloak too (5:40). Morris identifies this in the context of legal proceedings where Jesus' teaching is that one should not fight back but be willing to give one's opponent the more valuable cloak.⁶⁸ Turner adds that Jesus commands his disciple to go beyond the expected response, reasonably because it makes for peace and because he or she can be assured of the Father's care and provision.⁶⁹ Going the extra mile and giving to the one who asks was also part of Jesus' teaching (5:41-2). Turner, quoting Blomberg, comments that disciples are to be generous to the undeserving to avoid perpetuating the escalating cycle of evil reactions in a fallen world.⁷⁰ Morris adds that going well beyond what is asked will produce a blessing ultimately from God. He adds therefore that the command to give is unqualified and without condition.⁷¹ Jesus also referred to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field as demonstrating how much more the Father will care for us (6:26-30). The point made here according to Morris is that disciples should not worry but trust God.⁷² This in the context of unconditional generosity gives the clear message that the disciple who gives can legitimately expect God's care and provision for his own needs and for future acts of generosity. Turner confirms this view declaring that believers can

⁶³ Kruse, *Letters of John*, 138.

⁶⁴ David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008) 183.

⁶⁵ Turner, *Matthew*, 184.

⁶⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994 [1982]) 102.

⁶⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992) 138.

⁶⁸ Morris, *Matthew*, 127.

⁶⁹ Turner, *Matthew*, 175.

⁷⁰ Turner, *Matthew*, 175.

⁷¹ Morris, *Matthew*, 128.

⁷² Morris, *Matthew*, 157.

receive ‘God’s wonderful providence’ albeit through the exercise of their faith.⁷³ Thus, one perceives that the whole tenor of the NT is that love must not just be spiritualised, but that the gospel requires believers to show their love in practical and material ways. In other words, they are expected to be a blessing and consequently must be blessed materially through the blessing of Abraham to that end.

Now, returning to the letter to the Galatians, this will be examined to see if there is evidence within it that believers should bless others materially and practically. Firstly, I note Paul’s reference to the whole law being fulfilled in the statement that you should love your neighbour as yourself (5:14). Stott taught that if we love one another we shall fulfil the law’s requirements, with the help of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Longenecker advises that it is those ‘... who walk by the Spirit in loving service to others ...’ who fulfil the law.⁷⁵ Dunn also draws attention to the importance of this quote from Leviticus 19:18, making it clear that loving your neighbour as yourself is a teaching of much of the NT, that practical care for fellow believers and others is a fundamental part of the gospel.⁷⁶

Two other verses in Galatians also specifically address the financial practice of believers. In Galatians 6:6 Paul urges the believer who is taught the word to share ‘all good things’ with him who teaches, which is taken to refer to physical goods. Stott observes that this is a principle taught by Jesus in Luke 10:7 saying ‘the labourer deserves his wages’, and Paul taught the same thing explicitly saying, ‘If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?’ (1 Cor 9:11).⁷⁷ Dunn agrees that ‘all good things’ covered the things necessary for material well-being. As he says, the principle is stated ‘clearly and without qualification’ that those ‘who taught something of value should be supported by (their) followers’.⁷⁸

Another reference to practical assistance is recorded in Galatians 2:10, where Paul expressed his eagerness to help the poor, as the apostles in Jerusalem were anxious to do. Stott taught that Paul went to Jerusalem at least in part to offer famine relief, which he also continued to do. To that end, in the following years, he organized a

⁷³ Turner, *Matthew*, 200.

⁷⁴ Stott, *Galatians*, 142-3.

⁷⁵ Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) 84.

⁷⁶ Dunn, *Galatians*, 291.

⁷⁷ Stott, *Galatians*, 167.

⁷⁸ Dunn, *Galatians*, 327.

collection from the wealthier Christians of Macedonia and Achaia.⁷⁹ Dunn observes that the major thrust of the Jerusalem apostles was for financial help. He suggests that this was Paul's confirmation that 'almsgiving was a moral obligation that followed naturally from ... faith in Messiah Jesus...'⁸⁰ Thus we have reasonable confirmation also from Galatians that practical, material help is expected of new covenant believers, who thus would legitimately look for physical blessings as heirs of Abraham (Gal 3:29).

Finally, in support of financial and material blessings for new covenant believers it would be appropriate to consider if Paul, himself, received and gave such blessings to others. Firstly, I note that his practice was to earn his own keep (1 Cor 9:9-17) or to receive from generous churches like Philippi (Phil 4:14-16). Fung comments on Galatians 6:6 that Paul did not consistently exercise his right to receive payment for his ministry, but consistently waived it.⁸¹ In so doing Fung suggests, quoting Bruce, that Paul appears to have 'interpreted the Lord's command (on this subject) not as a duty to be performed but as a right to be claimed – or not claimed as might be most expedient.'⁸² Hendriksen also sees Galatians 6:6 in the context of a reminder to provide materially for those in need, including those entrusted with oversight.⁸³ The point is that Paul's practice of declining to receive financially from Galatia whilst receiving from generous churches like Philippi indicates that he was giving materially to those to whom he was preaching, thereby demonstrating the principle of giving and receiving in his own life and ministry. There is therefore a case to be made for giving and receiving materially as a new covenant believer under the blessing of Abraham as described in Galatians 3. Furthermore, there does not appear to be a convincing argument as to why the blessing of Abraham for NT believers should be spiritual only, in view of the whole tenet of the NT that faith should be expressed by practical works of love and care.

Prosperity Teaching Thus Substantiated – First, from Galatians 3:14, it must be noted that the promise of the Spirit is not particularly at issue with prosperity teachers, but only the blessing of Abraham. The discussion on the material application of this

⁷⁹ Stott, *Galatians*, 46.

⁸⁰ Dunn, *Galatians*, 113.

⁸¹ Ronald Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988) 293.

⁸² Fung, *Galatians*, 293.

⁸³ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982 [1968]) 236.

blessing for contemporary believers, in the previous section, would appear to give adequate justification for applying the blessing of Abraham to present-day Christians, in keeping with Osborne's view that the core meaning is invariable, but that it may have diverse implications.⁸⁴ The promise of land in Genesis 12:1-3 may well represent, typologically, the source of income the Lord provides for the individual, a contemporary application as recommended by Osborne with McCartney and Clayton.⁸⁵

These passages indicate that the giving of this blessing to Gentiles is to enable believers to be a blessing, whose influence inevitably spreads further and wider. Therefore they begin to demonstrate the first aspect of my proposed three category prosperity theology. This is the *righteousness* category which affirms that this blessing should be used to bring relief to other individuals, churches and ministries, as well as for the present blessing of the recipient. Moreover, *righteousness* in this area would reject the build-up of personal funds without regarding them as available to alleviate such need as the Lord may bring to one's attention. Another principle of *righteousness* which emerges from these passages is that of separation from unrighteous sources of income so it becomes apparent that God has made the believer prosperous.

5.2.4. Theme 3 – Debt and Miraculous Debt Cancellation

Introduction - This theme provides practical guidance on borrowing and how debts may be reduced or eliminated through prudent financial planning as well as, more controversially, how debts may be miraculously cancelled through divine intervention. Copeland, in particular, was poor and significantly in debt when converted, and teaches strongly on this theme, advising against debts of any sort (see §4.2.4.). Avanzini addresses three of his seven books on the issue of avoiding or overcoming debt (see §4.2.6.).⁸⁶ The scriptures most frequently quoted on this theme, Romans 13:8⁸⁷ and 2 Kings 4:1-7⁸⁸, are examined over their opposition to debt and for any justification in expecting miraculous intervention, since believers are usually responsible for incurring their own debt.

Romans 13:8 - The Principle of Debt as Interpreted by Word-faith Prosperity

⁸⁴ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23.

⁸⁵ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 328; McCartney and Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 163.

⁸⁶ Avanzini, *War on Debt; Rapid Debt Reduction Strategies; God's Debt Free Guarantee*.

⁸⁷ Kenneth Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 89-91.

⁸⁸ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 97-100, 137, *Debt Free Guarantee*, 19.

Teachers – Kenneth Copeland quotes this verse in support of his opposition to any form of indebtedness, testifying that he and his wife made a quality decision based on this verse never to borrow again for any purpose.⁸⁹ The implication was that borrowing is not God’s way for conducting financial affairs since it involves subservience to the lender. Avanzini, who has also written extensively on debt reduction and avoidance of extortion by lenders, follows the sentiment of this verse though apparently less vigorously than Copeland. Their interpretation of this verse will now be evaluated by comparison with the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 together with the interpretation of contemporary commentators.

Comments on Their Interpretation – Romans 13:8 contains a plain element not to owe any person anything, with the exception of the debt to love. So the meaning which Word-faith prosperity teachers draw from this is the simple apparent teaching of the text, whereas the commentators whose works are quoted below seem to focus on a significance that one should diligently pay what one owes. Therefore, for them, debt is only debt if one reneges on one’s loan repayment. So Kenneth Copeland’s teaching appears to be a perfectly legitimate interpretation, even if its implementation would be rather radical for most believers.⁹⁰ So far as selection of texts is concerned this verse appears to be a lone reference to being in debt so far as NT Christian teaching is concerned and as such ought to be regarded with some caution, even if, as seems likely, the interpretation of this verse appears to be prudent.

Kenneth Copeland’s interpretation of this verse is assisted, as is common in his later works, by reference to an alternative translation. He reports that the ‘Owe no man any thing...’ of the Authorized Version is translated plainly as ‘Keep out of debt...’ by the Amplified Bible, which he reasonably take to be God’s instruction on the matter.⁹¹ There appears to be little comment to make regarding genre or historical context for the letter in question was more of a general epistle than many and would also be of direct application to believers with no obvious OT connection. Copeland’s interpretation of this verse also shows evidence of the Spirit’s illumination in the interpretation and application of this verse. He testifies running across this scripture and felt God’s confirmation that he was indeed leading him to become debt free based upon it, at much the same time that he felt God’s leading to form an international

⁸⁹ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 89-91.

⁹⁰ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 90.

⁹¹ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 90.

ministry.⁹² So the Spirit-inspired significance was also the surface meaning of this text which Copeland and his wife have adhered to strictly since then. So, one text, with the Spirit's illumination, made the principle clear to him. However, other commentators are not so clear about it.

Support by Commentators - Haldane, writing in the early nineteenth century, regarded this verse as an instruction to Christians to pay what they owed scrupulously.⁹³ Moo also comments that this text carries an underlying love theme, but agrees with Haldane that the main thrust is to pay one's debts.⁹⁴ Moo adds that Christians are not to be in debt to anyone, except the debt to love one another. Yet the contemporary significance he discerns is to pay back what one owes. Moo suggests Paul is calling believers to be 'careful, prudent financial planners' carrying no more debt than they can manage.⁹⁵ Stott appears to support this interpretation, suggesting that no debt should be left outstanding, except of course for the continuing debt of love.⁹⁶ Furthermore, he implies caution with loans, but these scholars do not see a case for forbidding loans from this scripture.

Conclusion – This scripture shows Paul's concern for loving one's neighbour, believing that he who loves his neighbour performs his duty to the whole world. In this context, then, not owing anything may mean simply being diligent and timely with repayments. However, even if this is conceded, being a borrower cannot but place one as servant to the lender. Moreover, the posture of being a borrower hardly seems consistent with the authority the believer is perceived to exercise through faith, as presented in the faith category (see §5.2.5.).

2 Kings 4:1-7 Miraculous Debt Cancellation

As Interpreted by Word-faith Prosperity Teachers - Avanzini quotes Elisha as an example of bringing miraculous solutions to debt crises (2 Kings 4:1-7).⁹⁷ The principles he teaches about debt are that it results in slavery so that one is free in that area. Also he perceives that in addition to trusting in God one should also trust one's

⁹² Kenneth Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 90.

⁹³ Robert Haldane, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960 [1835]) 588.

⁹⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000) 433-436.

⁹⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 436.

⁹⁶ John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 348.

⁹⁷ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 97-103.

man of God to reveal effective strategies for dealing with debt. Through this means he is convinced that God's miraculous intervention may be expected along with renewed hope and prospects for the future.⁹⁸ However, Avanzini probably takes his interpretation too far when he declares that prosperity is not available to believers if they do not trust 'their man of God'.⁹⁹ Avanzini sees connections of this theme with Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16) where similar miraculous provision was made and with another episode in the life of Elisha whilst also miraculously dealing with the lost axe head (2 Kings 6:1-7).¹⁰⁰ However, Hagin latterly declares that there is no scriptural warrant for such debt cancellation.¹⁰¹ He would appear to have overlooked this scripture in his predisposition for looking only to the epistles for guidance.

Comments on their Interpretation – Clearly the examples of miraculous assistance with debt and poverty given above might legitimately be regarded as isolated instances from the OT seldom repeated and therefore of questionable application to believers today. This would be a reasonable conclusion were it not for the fact that Jesus made special reference to Elijah and Elisha in the context of his own Spirit-anointed ministry (Luke 4:23-27). Therefore, the prosperity teachers' use of this and similar passages from their lives to teach miraculous debt reduction appears more justifiable. The significance of this OT passage extends well beyond the context of OT Israel, but the application made by Avanzini offers hope to those in debt, particularly when it is not due to the person's own fault or neglect.¹⁰² His teaching is to trust the Lord in such circumstances, which is prudent, and adds that if you believe his prophets you will prosper, a view which ought to be treated with caution so that one is not led astray by false prophecy, even if well-meant.¹⁰³ Regarding the selection of texts it is clearly a problem that a great deal of prosperity teaching is based on such a few OT texts with minimal NT supporting texts. Accordingly, one must treat that part of this subject on miraculous debt cancellation with caution, whereas wisdom with minimising loans appears to be logically prudent.

The genre of 1 and 2 Kings is clearly an historical account of the times of those

⁹⁸ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 101-3.

⁹⁹ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 103

¹⁰⁰ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 29;

¹⁰¹ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 154.

¹⁰² Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 97-8.

¹⁰³ Avanzini, *War on Debt*, 103.

prophets and its application to NT and contemporary believers may be doubtful. Moreover, it appears that Avanzini has little regard for the rules of interpretation concerning genre as recommended by Cotterell and Turner.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, he apparently applies this episode directly to contemporary believers in keeping with the simplistic contractual approach to Scripture common to all Word-faith prosperity teachers.

In keeping with this, Osborne writes that contemporary believers should use allegory to ascribe a different meaning than in OT times.¹⁰⁵ Perriman suggests that the terms of the old covenant may not be legitimately applied to the contemporary church and implies that the OT should be used typologically and analogically and not literally for the church, which would allow for the change in covenant.¹⁰⁶ Therefore in making the transition from OT to NT Avanzini and others should show the allegorical and typological application of this OT passage to contemporary believers, but none is forthcoming from them. However, if such typology could be applied to the Word-faith teaching on this passage it might help to clarify the perception of their interpretation. If Elisha's actions are a type for contemporary application, it might be on the basis that Elisha was the Spirit-anointed follower of Elijah, so Elisha therefore becomes a type of the Spirit-anointed followers of Jesus who may therefore reasonably bring about miraculous deliverances from debt as Jesus did (Matt 17:24-7).¹⁰⁷

As to the illumination of the Spirit, it is evident that the Word-faith prosperity teachers rely upon this quite considerably. However, the genuineness of such illumination is hard to discern on the basis of the writer's own spiritual perceptions, for, as Archer and Yong confirm, it is the responsibility of the Christian or Pentecostal community as a whole to affirm such impressions of the Spirit's illumination.¹⁰⁸ The illumination of the Spirit is perhaps discernible in Avanzini's comparison of the widow in debt and the lost axe-head (2 King 4:1-7 and 2 Kings 6:1-7).¹⁰⁹ He perceives a common theme of debt cancellation which is apparent. Also, in the parallel passage on Elijah and the widow he perhaps spiritually discerns that when the widow added giving to her praying then a divine response followed immediately, revealing a further debt

¹⁰⁴ Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 223.

¹⁰⁵ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 329.

¹⁰⁶ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 88-9.

¹⁰⁷ Avanzini, *Debt Free Guarantee*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 248-9; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 275-310.

¹⁰⁹ Avanzini, *Debt-Free Guarantee*, 19.

reduction strategy.¹¹⁰

Support by Commentators - Hobbs describes this scripture simply as a narrative, depicting the danger of the widow's sons being given up as payment of the debt.¹¹¹ Ironically, the solution lay in borrowing. Vessels were borrowed, the number reflecting the woman's faith.¹¹² Dilday seems to think the woman's faith was limited, but it was sufficient to pay off the debts and live off the remaining proceeds for some considerable time. In addition to spiritual applications, a legitimate practical application is that God will direct his people in enterprises that he will bless for deliverance from debt.

Gray notices that the miracle was performed in the prophet's absence, indicating God's power was released by actions taken as an expression of the woman's faith, guided by the prophet.¹¹³ Debt is seen as potentially evil, firstly because it may not alleviate poverty, and secondly because it has the capacity to enslave those who have indebted themselves. As mentioned, it is also evil because it postures the borrower as servant or slave to the lender.

Montgomery points out the 'enormous increase of the woman's oil',¹¹⁴ demonstrating the generosity of God in overcoming debt. Also, it reveals God's wisdom in solving financial lack through the launch of a private enterprise made possible by the miracle. Indeed, the miracle delivered the woman from debt and familial separation, also providing a sufficient income for the foreseeable future (2 Kings 4:7). The inference is that God's plan frees people from reliance upon donations and enables them to financially contribute to society through successful enterprises, confirming that one person's financial increase does not have to cause another person's poverty.

Conclusion – All of those quoted agree that debt is to be regulated carefully, whilst others affirm that Christians should not be in debt to anyone, as is Kenneth Copeland's view. Although miraculous debt cancellation is depicted in Scripture, it finds little or no support among the commentators consulted. However, although debt cancellation

¹¹⁰ John Avanzini, *John Avanzini Answers Your Questions about Biblical Economics* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1992) 117.

¹¹¹ T. R. Hobbs, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 13: 2 Kings* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985) 50.

¹¹² Russell Dilday, *The Preacher's Commentary: 1, 2 Kings* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1987) 273.

¹¹³ John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1964) 441.

¹¹⁴ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Kings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1967 [1951]) 366.

may not be a maxim for all believers, and borrowing may be appropriate for acquiring certain useful capital assets capable of generating more income, seeking deliverance from debts could be an option for believers. This could involve cancelling debts unwisely entered into, or, as Avanzini portrays, wisdom and faith may be applied to legitimate debts in order to reduce interest payments and to limit their financial impact. Copeland, of course, may be commended for insisting on freedom from debt, but Avanzini and Hagin would regard his position as unnecessarily extreme.

Prosperity Teaching from Romans 13:8 and 2 Kings 4:1-7 Thus Substantiated –

Regarding the *righteousness* category of the proposed categorised prosperity strategy,¹¹⁵ the following points are thus substantiated from the Word-faith prosperity teaching and from the commentators consulted. Firstly, if one is in debt, it is clear that one must be diligent and punctilious in paying what one owes on time. Furthermore, for many Pentecostals and others, separating ten percent of one's income for donation to the Lord is regarded as a financial obligation in which one must be regular and reliable, having some similarity to the paying of one's debts.

For the *wisdom* category this theme reminds believers of the wisdom of trusting God for one's financial needs, so that one does not resort to worldly ways of solving financial problems. In particular there is strong advice to avoid debt as far as one can, and if loans are regarded as essential the believer must keep the loan to a manageable level. This is to facilitate another *wisdom* strategy, that of building and preserving a surplus for making charitable donations as the Lord may lead. The restriction of debt is also wise because as Avanzini affirms, debt is the devil's strategy for limiting the activities of the believer.¹¹⁶

Despite the lack of support from the commentators for Copeland's interpretation of Romans 13:8 that debt should be avoided completely, the significance of 2 Kings 4:1-7 is that seeking God's solution to financial problems, whatever their cause, has the prospect of turning severe shortage, lack and debt around to produce a stable and relatively prosperous situation with sufficient income for the needs of those involved. This represents the *faith* category of the proposed categorised prosperity strategy, where one's trust in God's solution needs expression, in this case in borrowing vessels and pouring out the oil. As mentioned by Dilday, the woman's faith was expressed in

¹¹⁵ Introduced and explained in §5.3.

¹¹⁶ Avanzini, *Debt Reduction*, 16.

the number of vessels she borrowed, to which God responded with the miraculous provision.¹¹⁷ So the *faith* category recommends adopting some method for expressing one's faith.

5.2.5. Theme 4 – Faith and Positive Confession

Introduction – Word-faith prosperity teaching involves the role of faith, also including expressing one's expectations verbally. Theme 4, therefore, considers the extent to which such activities represent a valid interpretation of Scripture and a legitimate strategy for improving one's prosperity.

Faith - Mark 11:22-4

As Taught by Word-faith Prosperity Teachers - As presented by Avanzini, this scripture encourages faith in God involving the declaration of a positive outcome, for he affirms that declaring the truth of Scripture verbally places the believer in authority spiritually over the forces of evil.¹¹⁸ Savelle suggests the use of this scripture for working works of faith following Jesus' example.¹¹⁹ Hagin quoted Mark 11:23 noting from the Authorized Version, its repetition of the verb *to say*, to express one's faith,¹²⁰ making the point that believing requires verbal affirmation (Rom 10:8). Kenneth Copeland also teaches from Mark 11 that asking in faith means that you believe you receive the answer before it arrives.¹²¹

Comments on the Interpretation of Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers - The human author(s) of Mark's gospel would have as their purpose to record the words of Jesus for their fellow disciples and, writing some decades after the teaching they were describing, they would probably have a better idea of their meaning and application than at the time. It is likely that Kenneth Copeland has given some attention to the author's intent when he uses this passage to support his teaching on praying for what he calls 'a heavenly grant'.¹²² His teaching would appear to be directly in line with the author's intention when he teaches that one must believe one receives the finance and confess that it is received before it has arrived. He also follows this concept when he declares that whatever you ask for, trust and be confident that it is granted to you and

¹¹⁷ Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 273.

¹¹⁸ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 50.

¹¹⁹ Savelle, *Heritage of Faith*, 21.

¹²⁰ Hagin, *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 26.

¹²¹ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 174-5.

¹²² Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 102-3.

you will receive it.¹²³ However, it is true that he makes no overt reference to the author's intention, being more attuned to the 'simplistic contractual hermeneutic' common among Word-faith prosperity teachers.

As mentioned in §3.3.3., Hirsch declares that the meaning of a text is unvarying but may have varying significance though not incompatible with the original meaning.¹²⁴ This concept is now widely accepted by hermeneutics specialists and with this text, its use is in a context probably unforeseen by the author but would not be inconsistent with it. For example when Hagin quotes verse 23 he writes that believers' faith can always be discerned by the way they talk over the issues in question.¹²⁵ His conclusion is that believers should *only* expect help from God by applying his word to the problem. This is probably a reasonable application but it may be a significance which goes beyond the text which does not specifically refer to quoting Scripture. So, perhaps believers may legitimately have a little more freedom to make specific declarations regarding their hopes and aspirations not actually contained in Scripture, but not inconsistent with it.

Savelle also quotes Mark 11:23 teaching from it that Jesus told the disciples to have faith in God so that they would be able to do what he did to the fig tree.¹²⁶ Now, not surprisingly, few contemporary believers have problems with fig trees, so it must have application for them elsewhere. Furthermore, in verse 23 Jesus expressed the need for faith with reference to moving mountains by speaking to them. Savelle's comment is that this is an example of Jesus living by faith which he also expects believers to do through their faith-filled words. This is a reasonable interpretation which can be applied to believers today. There is no obvious application of mountains to believers' lives but he implies that they represent any resistant thing which impairs the believer's progress.

As has been noted, Word-faith prosperity teachers have had a preference for the Authorized Version which is less apparent in their most recent works. Their interpretation is assisted to some degree by the use of one or two other translations, which McCartney and Clayton regard as valuable.¹²⁷ For example, Kenneth Copeland

¹²³ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 174.

¹²⁴ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 103-26.

¹²⁵ Hagin, *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 39-40.

¹²⁶ Savelle, *Heritage of faith*, 20-1.

¹²⁷ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 178-80.

interprets the Mark 11 passage with the help of the Amplified Bible.¹²⁸ This strengthens the proposed interpretation based on the scholarly expertise of the translation panel for this Bible giving more confidence that the interpretation that whenever a believer asks he should trust confidently and expectantly that it is granted and will arrive. This may be a concept not widely taught among more traditional believers but it appears to be clarified by the alternative translation.

As McCartney and Clayton passionately declare, ‘An appreciation of the diversity of genres within Scripture is crucial to its interpretation...’.¹²⁹ Yet there appears to be no reference to genre or historical context with the Word-faith prosperity teachers quoted preferring rather to adhere to their ‘contractual hermeneutic’ as claimed by Perriman.¹³⁰ A typical example of this in the writing of Kenneth Copeland is found where he quotes Mark 11:24 teaching that as you act on the word of God your desires will grow in line with God’s purposes.¹³¹ This interpretation is drawn out of the text without reference to the genre or historical setting in which it was made. Nor is there a clear distinction as to which covenant this applies to, old or new. However, caution must be exercised before dismissing the Word-faith interpretation, since if every word in the original language is God-given, as McQuilkin held, the contractual hermeneutic may produce an interpretation with some degree of reliability.¹³²

The Spirit’s illumination was regarded as so important that Pinnock placed it on a par with the original inspiration of Scripture, referring to its’ original and contemporary inspiration.¹³³ Word-faith prosperity teachers have a natural predisposition towards seeking and expecting the Spirit’s illumination, which is accentuated as much as genre and historical context is ignored. For example, Hagin quotes Mark 11:23 about which he testified hearing from God to the effect that one must do three times as much saying as believing in this.¹³⁴ Such a statement is clearly based on the repetition of the word ‘say’ or ‘saith’ which is not found in other translations. The Spirit may be emphasizing the importance of speaking out one’s faith but this appears to have taken it too far. Also, Avanzini quoting Mark 11:23 draws a more general application, to the effect that believers should change their mode of expression by speaking positively

¹²⁸ Copeland, *Blessed to be a Blessing*, 174.

¹²⁹ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 223.

¹³⁰ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 92.

¹³¹ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 25-6.

¹³² McQuilkin, *Applying the Bible*, 113-24.

¹³³ Pinnock, ‘Spirit in Hermeneutics’, 3-5.

¹³⁴ Hagin, *Turn Your Faith Loose*, 26, 39.

about themselves and their circumstances.¹³⁵ He teaches that a negative confession only makes one's problems grow bigger. This, he clearly believes to be a Spirit inspired significance also confirmed through his personal experience. It is not declared to be so in this case, but it is difficult to imagine these prosperity teachers not drawing on what they perceive to be the illumination of the Spirit.

Support from Commentators – Barth discussed 'the royal man' suggesting with reference to Mark 11:23 that miracles result from a believer's confident declaration, in much the same way as a monarch may issue royal decrees.¹³⁶ He commented that Jesus is the creator of the earth and will create the new heaven and the new earth (Is 65:17) so faith must have 'the quality ... that ... removes mountains and trees and that nothing is impossible to it' (Mark 11:23).¹³⁷ He suggested that faith should display a creative element to be worthy of the name. He regards this quality as 'an essential element of faith in Him.'¹³⁸ Barth also noted that the grain of mustard seed (Mark 4:31) demonstrates that no 'massive or heroic or striking faith,' is required but 'a minimum of faith is enough for the performance of what is impossible ... to man'.¹³⁹

English regards the use of faith for miraculous works as 'risky faith',¹⁴⁰ to be exercised in one's prayers, with positive anticipation.¹⁴¹ Commenting on this, Edwards observes the earnestness of the commandment to 'have faith in God', noting the power of faith, with what he regards as, perhaps, an exaggerated claim for it to move mountains.¹⁴² He believes faith is a choice, while resisting doubt and fear, trusting Jesus despite every circumstance. Gundry is aware of the possible interpretation of this phrase as 'you have God's faithfulness' suggesting that this does not agree with the need to pray and ask, mentioned in this passage (v. 24).¹⁴³ So the considered view is that this expresses God's power and willingness to fulfil one's declaration in answer to prayer. Witherington, similarly, sees verse 24 as meaning that

¹³⁵ Avanzini, *Debt-Free Guarantee*, 39-44.

¹³⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.2, 220.

¹³⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.1, 35.

¹³⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.1, 35.

¹³⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.2, 233.

¹⁴⁰ Donald English, *The Message of Mark* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992) 189.

¹⁴¹ English, *Message of Mark*, 190.

¹⁴² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002) 346-7.

¹⁴³ Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993) 651.

whatever one asks for in prayer, whilst believing, shall certainly be granted.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion – The commentators confirm the view that the exercise of faith in God is central to Christian spirituality. Words spoken in faith may be considered to be one means of expressing such faith. English's risky faith is the faith that expects to change things thought impossible, producing an environment where nothing would be regarded as impossible.

Positive Confession – Joshua 1:8

As Interpreted by Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – Hagin advocated declaring scriptures to produce changed circumstances, as an expression of one's faith.¹⁴⁵

Savelle also teaches on positive confession, that it gives believers confidence when facing demonic challenges, and quotes Joshua 1:8 where God's servant was commanded to keep the word of God in his mouth.¹⁴⁶ Kinnebrew's doctoral study on positive confession acknowledged that it allegedly increases faith and changes one's circumstances.¹⁴⁷ He notes that Romans 10:17, Mark 11:23, in addition to Joshua 1:8 are used by various teachers in support of this teaching.

Comments on the Word-Faith Interpretation of Joshua 1:8 – This is one of a number of texts quoted by Savelle on this theme also referring to 2 Chronicles 20:14-25, Jeremiah 33:11 and Proverbs 6:30-31 as well as numerous NT texts.¹⁴⁸ His purpose seems to have been more to show that he is representing the view for the whole Bible as recommended by Perriman, rather than to demonstrate any continuity or adjustment in moving from the OT to the NT as Dunn would have expected.¹⁴⁹

In moving from the OT to the NT and beyond, Joshua 1:8 represents an OT text that needs interpretation for NT believers, a process often involving typology, analogy or allegory.¹⁵⁰ However, when Savelle quoted this text it was presented as a bald statement whose meaning was to be taken at face value without any such attention to analogy or typology.¹⁵¹ Savelle quotes this verse as part of notes taken from Kenneth Copeland's teaching on his first 'Laws of Prosperity' Seminar in Oklahoma City in

¹⁴⁴ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001) 318.

¹⁴⁵ Hagin, *Godliness in Profitable*, 23.

¹⁴⁶ Savelle, *Can't Steal Your Joy*, 44, 79-80, 82, 88.

¹⁴⁷ Kinnebrew, *Positive Confession*, 53.

¹⁴⁸ Savelle, *Can't Steal Your Joy*, 45, 79, 85, 88; *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 200.

¹⁴⁹ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 84; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 100-1.

¹⁵⁰ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 328-9.

¹⁵¹ Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 200.

1972.¹⁵² Therefore Savelle interprets this text as a means of achieving prosperity. This is a teaching also brought by Hagin, who regarded this verse as God's instruction to Joshua on how to prosper.¹⁵³ Hagin relates this verse to 1 Timothy 4:15 suggesting a link with meditation. But since no typological significance is drawn from this verse their conclusion would be that it is appropriate to apply it directly to contemporary believers, the only difference being in the wider spread of scriptures that may be quoted in this way. At issue then, is the veracity of the belief that making scripturally based, positive, hopeful, optimistic statements will have the power to shape one's future positively.

Support of Commentators - Hamlin points out the spiritual application of the mouth, to chew and inwardly digest God's commands, but also to speak them upon the lips.¹⁵⁴ As Woudstra confirms, the word of God is to be meditated upon and spoken out, advising that 'happy achievement of life's goal' and prosperity will be the outcome.¹⁵⁵ For Rösel, the unlikely command that God's word should not depart out of Joshua's mouth, suggests that declaring texts aloud would be an essential part of reading the word.¹⁵⁶ He regarded this as important for Joshua whose campaign to possess the land relied so heavily upon the Lord. He adds that the language indicates 'muttering' and 'reading in an undertone', pointing out that 'day and night' implies a continual or often repeated practice.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, Joshua 1:8 indicates that any work of faith requires continual repetition and reminding of Scriptural promises, supporting such faith (Rom 10:17). Despite the claims of the critics,¹⁵⁸ King points out that the ideas of positive and negative confession were taught by some well-respected faith teachers of recent history, who regarded it as a legitimate Christian practice. Indeed, King traces positively confessing one's faith back as far as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.¹⁵⁹

Conclusion – It is significant that faith expressed confidently and verbally would

¹⁵² Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 197.

¹⁵³ Hagin, *Godliness is Profitable*, 23.

¹⁵⁴ E. John Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land: A Commentary on the Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983) 6.

¹⁵⁵ Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981) 63.

¹⁵⁶ Hartmut N. Rösel, *Joshua*, (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2011) 35.

¹⁵⁷ Rösel, *Joshua*, 36

¹⁵⁸ Dave Hunt & T.A. MacMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1986 [1985]) 154-5; Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 66.

¹⁵⁹ King, *Only Believe*, 253-4.

appear to place the believer in a position of authority in spiritual conflict. This would legitimately be a position of authority where faith would be essential for a declaration consistent with the perceived will of God. Such a practice would, assist in overcoming evil forces. Even so, it is of concern that, in Paul's life, he seemed not to adopt such a policy in order to overcome the challenges he faced, including financial lack, beatings and imprisonment. However, prosperity teachers do not regard his experiences as programmatic for believers, concluding that they should be able to overcome such trials through their faith. If this is the case, then it would be legitimate in the realm of financial provision, to rule in faith by confident declaration of Scripture. This might be adopted much more by believers in overcoming evil attempts to frustrate God's purposes for them.

Prosperity Teaching Thus Substantiated – From the prosperity teaching of theme 4 it is possible to derive certain principles to contribute to a categorised prosperity classification which is consistent with the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3. Concerning issues of *righteousness*, it is noted from Joshua 1:8 that God's commandment was to keep the word of God on one's lips in meditation as a means of ensuring obedience to it and therefore of maintaining righteousness in financial dealings. Also, Mark 11:24 makes reference to the believer's desires as the subject of their prayers. The issue of *righteousness* which might be raised here is that such desires regarding financial prosperity must not be for selfish indulgence and may well be God-given to ensure their worthiness as a subject for prayer. In addition, the implication is to trust only in God, without recourse to human resources.

Joshua 1:8 shows that, for believers, obedience to the word of God will make one prosperous and successful. The *wisdom* key would be to apply Scripture to all aspects of one's life through declaring or meditating on the scriptures concerned. *Wisdom* would also suggest that positive, hopeful and optimistic declaration should replace negative and despondent speech. This appears to prosperity teachers to have reasonable prospects for developing prosperity and achieving believers' life goals with some agreement from the commentators quoted.

For the *faith* category it is confirmed that faith should be expressed by words of hope and expectancy. In this way the believer can express trust that he or she will receive the financial provision they ask for. Faith should be expressed verbally by words not necessarily quoted from Scripture, but not inconsistent with it. As mentioned, Barth

declared it must have the mountain moving aspect. The mountains removed by the believer's faith-filled words would seldom be physical obstructions, but more likely financial insufficiency or resistance by the forces of evil. Thus, the exercise of faith gives believers authority in such conflict. It is also described as risky faith implying that it requires one to believe that God will fulfil one's desires and prayers whilst having no resort to worldly solutions to one's problems. Finally, there is support for the belief that faith expressed verbally will change things miraculously and so one should have confidence in the desired outcome.

5.2.6. Theme 5 – The Hundredfold Return and Treasure in Heaven

Introduction – This theme addresses aspects of Word-faith prosperity teaching involving the application of faith for more miraculous results, which would be regarded as the more extreme views taught by such prosperity teachers.

5a. The Hundredfold Return

As Taught by Word-faith Teachers – It is supported among Word-faith prosperity teachers by the parable of the sower (Mark 4:20). Roberts, as a *seed-faith* prosperity teacher, taught believers to expect thirty, sixty or a hundredfold return on their giving,¹⁶⁰ whilst Gloria Copeland also teaches on the reality of the hundredfold return for believers.¹⁶¹ From Mark 4:20 Kenneth Copeland teaches that the word of God in a believer's heart bears fruit as much as a hundredfold, but he gives no indication of what such fruit might be.¹⁶² Savelle and Avanzini teach that, in view of such power, it is understandable that Satan would attempt to steal the word to prevent its effects.¹⁶³ It is also taught by Avanzini that a hundredfold return is dependent on the amount one sows.¹⁶⁴ Avanzini also declares that where one may regard the hundredfold as too much for heaven, it is no problem, for he teaches that there are no costs in heaven.¹⁶⁵ However, Hagin in his most recent work dismissed this concept as erroneous, believing this level of return to be illogical.¹⁶⁶ Yet Jesus never appeared disturbed by large demands made upon him for material provision, relying on more than a

¹⁶⁰ Oral Roberts, *Seed-Faith Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Tulsa, OK: Pinoak Publications, 1975) 131-2.

¹⁶¹ Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, c.1990 [1978]) 69-72.

¹⁶² Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 110.

¹⁶³ Savelle, *Can't Steal Your Joy*, 7, 15; Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 28-32.

¹⁶⁴ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 74.

¹⁶⁵ Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 135.

¹⁶⁶ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 143-145.

hundredfold return in some of his miracles (Mark 8:1-9, Luke 9:12-17, John 2:1-11). The issue is that logic should probably not be used to dismiss a repeated teaching of Jesus, however difficult it may be to understand how to apply such teaching.

Comments on Word-Faith Interpretation - Their teaching makes use of the meaning/significance distinction according to Hirsch's belief that a passage should have an invariable core meaning but diverse implications.¹⁶⁷ It would certainly appear to apply to this passage where the core meaning is taken to be the various responses to the message of the gospel. Yet Jesus himself suggested that there were principles here that could have wide ranging significance (v.13), so Word-faith prosperity teachers would perhaps be justified in applying the principle to all types of words received from God. Thus Kenneth Copeland might be justified in teaching that God's word in the heart brings fruit.¹⁶⁸ There would also be some justification for the teaching of Savelle that believers must resist the devil's attempts to make them abandon trust in the promises received through Scripture regarding increased prosperity.¹⁶⁹

When Avanzini and Savelle quote Mark 4:20, they are dealing with a scripture whose genre is the parable with all its particular mode of interpretation. Avanzini draws from this verse that the more you sow, the more you reap, but he is drawing a significance which is not within the purview of this parable since it is essentially commenting on the nature of soil as an explanation for various receptions of the seed which is declared to be the word.¹⁷⁰ Savelle also teaches from this parable that because the seed can produce thirty sixty or one hundredfold that one should 'strive for maximum results in *every seed* we sow'.¹⁷¹ However, in so doing he assumes an interpretation of the analogy of the seed to refer to financial gifts and provides no guidance on the transition from the seed as the 'word' to seed as money, which he seeks to support. Moreover, he could do more to explain how the believer overcomes those evil schemes which limit the harvest from the seed whether it be the word of God to the believer or financial donations. Avanzini also quotes Mark 10:30 on the theme of the hundredfold return that heaven can always produce such a return where believers are unselfish since for heaven the costs are insignificant.¹⁷² This is a direct

¹⁶⁷ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1-13, 103-26

¹⁶⁸ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 110.

¹⁶⁹ Savelle, *Can't Steal Your Joy*, 17.

¹⁷⁰ Avanzini, *Financial Excellence*, 74.

¹⁷¹ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 22-3. (italics and bold type in original)

¹⁷² Avanzini, *Principles of Increase*, 135.

teaching of Jesus following the discourse on the rich young ruler and is therefore of direct and unequivocal application.

Support by Commentators – Hooker comments that one's response to the word of God is to bear fruit from it, preventing one's exclusion from the company of believers.¹⁷³ She does not imply anything other than spiritual change in terms of fruit. Guelich, likewise, sees no distinction particularly between the three levels of response but simply as characterising the harvest in general.¹⁷⁴ Yet he identifies the 'word' with the 'gospel' so it brings good news of improvement even perhaps in one's material circumstances.¹⁷⁵ Witherington comments that bearing fruit abundantly relies on hearing reliably and regularly, the words which God imparts to the individual.¹⁷⁶ He affirms that such people are given the dominion or rule of God. He proposes that such special knowledge from God must meet with 'spiritual insight and understanding' to realise the harvest from them.¹⁷⁷ However, it is not clear whether he is arguing from the response to the gospel or to any other communication from God, but it is probable that the same principles apply to any context where God speaks to the individual,.

Also, Edwards places an emphasis on the type of hearing portrayed in verse 20. It implies a continual, ongoing hearing unlike the careless, inattentive hearing of the previous verses.¹⁷⁸ For greater fruitfulness the believer must both 'hear and receive' with spiritual insight, for, as Edwards concludes 'hearing, receiving and bearing fruit are the marks of a disciple of Jesus'. He also declares, 'A responsive hearing produces a miraculous harvest – "... even a hundred times what was sown"'.¹⁷⁹ This implies not an exact hundredfold return but simply a substantially multiplied return, of greater or lesser dimension.

It is significant to note that it was the 'word' from God that was sown, producing a multiplied return. So it is difficult to conceive in what form it might be received and how it was measured. It also raises the question of the appropriateness of applying this scripture to financial gifts. It does not seem to fit the circumstances of the parable

¹⁷³ Morna D. Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St Mark* (London: A & C Black {Publishers} Limited, 1991) 132.

¹⁷⁴ Robert A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary 34A: Mark 1-8:26* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989) 223.

¹⁷⁵ Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 1-8:26*, 225.

¹⁷⁶ Witherington III, *Gospel of Mark*, 117.

¹⁷⁷ Witherington III, *Gospel of Mark*, 117.

¹⁷⁸ Edwards, *Gospel According to St Mark*, 137-8.

¹⁷⁹ Edwards, *Gospel According to St Mark*, 138 (inner quotes in original).

well, but since it is declared to be the key to understanding all the parables (v. 13) then wider latitude may be allowed in its application and significance. However, this difficulty may be ameliorated if the gift of money is coupled with the associated scripture promising financial increase from the investment.

Prosperity Teaching Thus Substantiated – The suggested teaching is that fruitfulness is based on the distinctive quality of *hearing* based on Mark 4:3-20, for hearing well produces faith, producing fruit which gives one a sense of dominion over one's circumstances. Thus, hearing well and responding in faith become an effective method for increase. Contemporary commentators regard the hundredfold return as God's response to sacrifice as also taught in Mark 10:30, in terms of leaving one's livelihood and family connections, but most note its present application of assured fellowship and community wherever one may go. It would therefore be appropriate to conclude that sacrifices of other types, even in making charitable donations, will not lack a response from God although the hundredfold return may be reserved only for those making major sacrifices as exemplified by Studd (see §2.2.4.). The hundredfold return is clearly a response by God to both sacrifice and faith; faith because there is trust that when one has given sacrificially, the Lord will provide miraculously and plentifully for the believer.

5b. Treasure in Heaven

Introduction - Both Kenneth Copeland and Savelle focus on this topic, noting how deposits may be made in one's heavenly account, but also exploring how withdrawals may be made.¹⁸⁰ Among the verses most commonly referred to the interpretation of Matthew 6:20 will receive evaluation.

As Taught by Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – Kenneth Copeland teaches on this theme that there is a commonly held misconception that funds stored in heaven cannot be touched until one gets to heaven.¹⁸¹ On the contrary, he teaches that Jesus' meaning was to let heaven be your treasury, then whatever happens on earth you will have a bank that does not allow theft or ruin. So as you go on seeking the Lord, the assurance is that there will always be divine supply for your needs on earth. Savelle also teaches on this topic that Jesus is telling believers to establish a heavenly bank

¹⁸⁰ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 67; Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 208-15.

¹⁸¹ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 68.

account where the treasure stored remains ours to access.¹⁸² The principle, then, is that whatever one gives is stored there and goes into one's future to be drawn from that account when needed.

Comments on Their Interpretation – Regarding genre, this passage on treasure in heaven represent the direct teaching of Jesus to his followers, so that its message may be of direct application to contemporary believers. The place of this teaching in redemption history is of interest as proposed by Pinnock and Callen, for the interpretation will depend upon it.¹⁸³ This text may then legitimately be expressed as a messianic text applicable to believers today. The interpretation given by Kenneth Copeland is apparently based on Spirit-inspired significance that is not at odds with the author's intent. It seeks to address a commonly held misconception of the principle that treasure stored in heaven is unavailable whilst one is on the earth.¹⁸⁴ On the contrary, his view that this is a means of God providing for believers now is different but not inconsistent with the intended meaning. For as Pinnock declares, individuals can hear something different but legitimate from God.¹⁸⁵ Regarding Savelle's interpretation of this scripture, he apparently sees it as having direct application to believers, when he declares that they have 'a supply that is not subject to theft, ruin, inflation or depression'.¹⁸⁶ However justified such teaching may be, there would appear to be little if any guidance in Scripture on how to withdraw such funds when needed.

Support by the Commentators - For Barth this verse depicted the believer who is not avaricious and therefore free in Christ, for one cannot be preoccupied with amassing a treasure in this life.¹⁸⁷ Prosperity teachers would argue that neither are they, for they aim to move God-given funds through their hands for the gospel or the needy. Hagner sees 'treasure in heaven' as good works stored up before God (Ezra 6:5), and compares this with the folly of trusting in treasure stored on earth.¹⁸⁸ Indeed Jesus declared that life does not consist of abundance of possessions (Luke 12:16-21). Hagner says treasure is stored in heaven through gifts to the poor (Matt 19:21).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸² Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 208-9.

¹⁸³ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 63.

¹⁸⁴ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 68.

¹⁸⁵ Pinnock, 'Spirit in Hermeneutics', 22.

¹⁸⁶ Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 208-9. 212.

¹⁸⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.2. 689, 695.

¹⁸⁸ Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13* (Dallas TX: Word Books, 1993) 157.

¹⁸⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 158.

Turner points out that heavenly treasure is not damaged by moths or decay, providing security and permanence. He sees advantage with biblical values in mind so that wayward inclinations of the heart are restrained.¹⁹⁰ France considers, however, that material wealth is of no use beyond this life, so ‘treasure in heaven’ provides a durable alternative, of treasure with God.¹⁹¹ Such treasure is considered earned by gifts to the poor, with a bigger reward than suggested by the efforts. However, France does not disparage material possessions for this earth.¹⁹²

Prosperity Teaching Thus Substantiated – The comments of the commentators suggest the *wisdom* of storing treasure in heaven by appropriate charitable donations.

However, there is no concept of the value such treasure will have in heaven, nor of the difference it may make to one’s experience in heaven. Certainly, it is unlikely to have any monetary value in a kingdom where the streets are paved with gold. It may be considered that financial concern for others may produce other spiritual blessing in that place. But of more significance is the concept that funds stored in a heavenly bank account may be withdrawn for the believer’s present use. However, there appears to be little scriptural warrant for such a belief and no consistent comment on this from the scholars consulted. So what remains are two related Word-faith teachers who sense God’s guidance that this is both desirable and scriptural.¹⁹³ This seems inadequate to confidently support such a prosperity doctrine. However, if this concept were couched in terms of prayer to God for financial provision, with the proviso that God would be more disposed to respond to such a prayer if one has been generous, then few would dispute the appropriateness of the teaching. So the conclusion must be that this is a stylised presentation of a simple truth that God hears and answers the prayer of the righteous, especially those who are generous. Yet, no matter how appropriate the re-modelling of this teaching may be, it would introduce a potential weakness of providing no guarantee of such provision.

5.3. Formulation of a Three Category Prosperity Theology from the Prosperity Themes

5.3.1. Introduction

¹⁹⁰ Turner, *Matthew*, 196.

¹⁹¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007) 258.

¹⁹² France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 259.

¹⁹³ Kenneth Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 67-71, 90-94; Savelle, *Footsteps of a Prophet*, 208-13, 225-9.

Following the critique of each theme from Word-faith prosperity teaching, based upon the degree to which it complied with the considered hermeneutical strategy derived for this thesis in chapter 3 and with the interpretation of the commentators, as a result, it becomes apparent that certain prosperity teachings survived my evaluative test and those teachings are now consequently analysed, categorised and classified according to the type or category of prosperity teaching which the outcomes of this research represent. The purpose of this analysis is to form a systematic multi-faceted prosperity theology assembling the trusted aspects of prosperity teaching. What will be discovered as a result of this research is that certain features of the prosperity teaching carry more validity than others and I judge that the more valid teachings fall into three clusters to form a three category prosperity theology.

As demonstrated through this section and in subsequent chapters the prosperity teachings are found to fall into the categories of *righteousness*, *wisdom* and *faith* as they apply to prosperity issues. With regard to its place in this research, the three-fold categorisation results from the analysis of the findings that have emerged through the appropriation of the ‘ideal’ hermeneutical strategy. The formal theoretical account of the categorised prosperity theology model is that the hermeneutical examination of the prosperity themes in §§5.2.2-5. gives rise to numerous other related but distinct prosperity teachings that are to be included in the categorisation. Therefore, the prosperity themes themselves could not produce a sufficiently nuanced presentation of the prosperity theology. The analysis provided by the three category prosperity theology enables the findings of the hermeneutical analysis of prosperity themes to be developed in a manner that might be of some benefit to those who may wish to put my prosperity teaching into practice.

So the relation of the idealised hermeneutical strategy to the three category prosperity theology is that of *process* and *results* together with the categorised analysis, whereby the aspects of the prosperity themes will be seen to fall quite naturally into these three categories. This model helps the stated thesis by providing a three-fold view of the resultant prosperity theology and this classification enables the outcomes to be clearly presented and recognized.

5.3.2. Formation of the Proposed Prosperity Theology from Prosperity Themes

Introduction – Each of the prosperity themes formed from the hermeneutical analysis of Word-faith prosperity teaching is now examined in turn to reveal the nuanced

prosperity teachings they reveal. These are then analysed and characterised according to the three prosperity categories that emerge from this analysis.

Prosperity Issues Identified from the Themes - From theme 1 on the principle of prosperity, the following prosperity issues were identified as the avoidance of the love of money, being a form of idolatry and a manifestation of selfishness, the maintenance of balance between the material and spiritual aspects of a believer's life as well as pursuing wealth in fellowship with the Lord and guided by the Spirit. From theme 2 on the blessing of Abraham, the lessons learned from his experience and Paul's interpretation of them include avoiding all forms of security apart from the Lord himself, and a departure therefore from materialistic financial policies. Scholars also observed the ability of the blessing of Abraham to transform barren situations into fruitful ones by faith. As a role model for faith, believers are taught to be a blessing and for that purpose they are blessed. This therefore rules out hoarding of funds received from the Lord and recommends or even expects believers to be generous as an aspect of their prosperous soul.

From theme 3 on debt and its miraculous cancellation, the prosperity issues to emerge are that it is reasonable to expect that God may act in overcoming debt, even where it is entered into unwisely and ill-advisedly. Debt is considered to be imprudent in many cases because it does not alleviate poverty and it positions the borrower as servant to the lender, inconsistent with the ruling dimension of Word-faith teaching. However, where debt has been entered into it is regarded as honourable to pay what one owes carefully and punctually. This theme also emphasizes the importance of not overextending oneself since this is not consistent with loving one's neighbour (Lev 19:18). In overcoming debt Word-faith teaching on Elisha and the widow's debt (2 Kings 4:1-7) is that God will have a strategy for overcoming the believer's debt and this may well involve a private project or cottage industry that God will bless. This then represents faith and blessed labour but definitely not arduous labour for disappointing returns. A God-given activity suitable for raising funds and overcoming debt may well be revealed to the individual concerned.

Prosperity teachings from theme 4 on faith and positive confession include the value of declaring Scripture aloud as well as the value of meditation upon the word of God. The need to exercise faith also emerges with the reminder from Barth that the issue is not the amount of faith one possesses but that one uses the modest deposit one may

have. Faith also, properly applied, enables the believer to exercise God-given effective authority over their financial circumstances. Therefore, it is expected that one would resist doubt and fear concerning these matters as an expression of faith and as an act of righteousness.

From theme 5 dealing with the hundredfold return and treasure in heaven, the prosperity elements that arise are that hearing God clearly and responding in faith will lead to increase, as well as the belief that such giving may involve sacrifice. It is also believed that as a result of such sacrifice the believer may expect to receive multiplied returns being more than sufficient for his or her needs as well as providing a surplus to donate to others as the Lord may lead. This is perceived to be because such sacrificial giving accrues 'treasure in heaven' which is then available for the believer to claim and draw on. This is also expressed as appealing to God on the basis of one's previous generosity. Generosity, especially giving to the poor, is therefore perceived to be a wise policy, since God's favour would be towards such an individual believer. It is also considered prudent when asking in faith to be specific about the details of the item one is asking for, since God responds favourably to such requests and such specific asking makes it clear that God has heard and answered the specific request.

Conclusion - Having summarised the various prosperity components emerging from the hermeneutical evaluation of the Word-faith prosperity themes, in no particular order, the purpose now is to analyse them by arranging them in various categories where the similarities and distinctive differences may become apparent.

Analysis of Prosperity Teachings to Form a Categorised Prosperity Theology

Introduction - Having applied my hermeneutical strategy to Word-faith prosperity teaching, only those aspects formed with reasonable hermeneutical agreement survive this process. The aspects listed above are the ones that have survived this test and these constitute the unprocessed results from Word-faith prosperity teaching. These aspects are now consequently analysed and categorised according to common features. Accordingly, as one examines this list of prosperity aspects, one notices three categories around which the various elements may be clustered. The three prosperity categories that emerge are *righteousness*, involving honesty in all one's financial dealings, secondly *wisdom* including financial prudence and the avoidance of unnecessary debt and *faith* involving issues of trust in God's provision for the

generous. Thus the various prosperity elements are classified according to these three categories.

Category of Righteousness – Financial righteousness begins with the principle of tithing as a commitment to God's financial principles and as a declaration of trust in his provision as well as being a commandment confirmed in the teaching of Jesus (e.g. Luke 11:42). It also involves avoiding the love of money, regarded as a form of idolatry and motivated by selfishness. These points emerge from prosperity theme 1. Theme 2 adds to the *righteousness* category similarly that commitment to God as one's source of supply also requires a conscious separation from worldly financial practices. This theme also teaches that the avoidance of selfishness implies that the blessings received should be used at least in part to bless others in keeping with the blessing of Abraham. Consequently, hoarding of financial resources would be another aspect of unrighteousness to be avoided. Financial integrity, therefore, ensures that funds can pass through the believer's hands to others as the Lord may direct. From theme 3, righteousness requires the believer who may have a debt to pay what is owed reliably and promptly, and in general all financial dealing must be conducted honestly and with integrity. It is also noted from theme 4 that there is an element of *righteousness* in resisting doubt and fear when seeking to exercise one's faith.

Category of Wisdom – The *wisdom* issues from Theme 1 include the need to maintain balance between the material and spiritual aspects of a believer's life, so that in seeking material provision, emphasis should primarily be placed on seeking the Lord. The prosperity theology must not therefore be reduced to simply applying a set of prosperity principles, but wealth must be pursued in fellowship with the Lord, guided by the Spirit. From theme 3, the *wisdom* teaching is that, whatever one's degree of prosperity may be, one should moderate one's expenditure to enable the formation of a surplus, whilst also avoiding as much as possible the need for going into debt. This means that there will be something for the believer to give, regarded as the fundamental key for alleviating poverty and releasing the favour of God in his or her life. For those in debt the wise course is to carefully regulate debt and to implement strategies for more rapid debt reduction. The teaching on the story of Elisha and the widow's debt appears to legitimately demonstrate that God may well reveal a plan for some activity that will reduce debt, also suggesting some level of miraculous intervention to accelerate the process. Debt is regarded by many as potentially evil in

that it does not alleviate poverty and positions the borrower as servant to the lender (Prov 22:7), a position not in keeping with the controlling element which believers are encouraged to cultivate.

Category of Faith in God – The exercise of *faith* in God in improving one's material prosperity includes the following aspects, which include some of the more controversial aspects of prosperity teaching. However, such controversial aspects as are included in the proposed prosperity theology are deemed to have sufficient hermeneutical support and support from the commentators consulted to justify their cautious adoption. First of all, then, from theme 4, *faith* in God's provision can be expressed through the verbal declaration of those scriptures deemed to support such belief. Such positive confession is similar to meditation also including an element of verbal expression. Also concerning *faith* from theme 4 Barth advises that 'massive heroic faith' is not required but to actually use the measure of faith that one has, for even that he affirms has the capability of doing the impossible for man. Furthermore, such faith expressed wisely and confidently introduces a controlling dimension to declaration in faith.

From theme 5 the *faith* category also includes the fact that giving sacrificially in faith may well produce substantially increased returns, although the hundredfold return recorded in Scripture may not be expected routinely. Indeed, in the ministry of Jesus the miraculous increase he received at or beyond this level was in the context of providing for others. However, it is reasonable to expect more than sufficient for one's needs and an abundance for every good work (2 Cor 9:8). Also from theme 5 there is the *faith* teaching that giving generously also results in treasure stored in one's heavenly account from which funds may be drawn by *faith* in God. Alternatively this may be viewed as an appeal to God for provision with the understanding that God would be more disposed to respond favourably to the prayers of the generous. The central feature, then, of the *faith* category is asking in faith with the appropriate declaration of Scripture to build one's faith. In addition, it recommends generosity whilst exercising faith in God's supply to meet one's needs. Faith is also expressed through precise, specific requests from God expressing faith that they will be granted on the basis of one's previous generous giving.

Conclusion Regarding the Proposed Categorised Prosperity Theology – Thus, from the teaching of Word-faith prosperity teachers, three categories have emerged

representing three distinct facets to a prosperity theology consistent with the interpretation of Scripture on the basis of the ‘ideal’ considered hermeneutical strategy developed in this thesis. The *process* of the hermeneutical evaluation has produced *results* in terms of a prosperity theology in three clear categories of *righteousness*, *wisdom and faith*.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, such categorisation into three categories might be of benefit to those who wish to put my prosperity theology into practice. Thus this categorised prosperity theology assists with the stated thesis by providing a three-fold view of the prosperity issues examined. However, it is to be borne in mind that this prosperity theology will be augmented in chapter 6 and to some extent in chapter 7 where the teaching of non-Word-faith prosperity teachers as well as the critics and commentators are considered.

5.4. Concluding Remarks

The overall conclusion to the hermeneutical evaluation (see §5.3.2.) produced evidence for a prosperity theology in three categories subject to augmentation and adjustment in the light of further evidence from non-Word-faith prosperity teachers (see chapter 6) and the critics and commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching (see chapter 7). The first category contains issues of *righteousness* arising primarily from themes 1 and 2. Firstly, from theme one, the love of money is seen as the major error to be avoided, which amounts to idolatry and selfishness. It is also an expression of greed contrary to the great commandment to love one’s neighbour (Lev 19:18, Matt 19:18). Other themes suggest loving one’s neighbour by conducting one’s financial affairs righteously and being careful to pay what one owes, whilst not hoarding.

Primarily from theme 3 comes *wisdom* in financial matters, the second category of the propose prosperity theology. Firstly, this implies caution over incurring debt, recommending its reduction as soon as possible, whilst also maintaining generosity through the generation of a surplus for this purpose, however modest the level may be.

The *faith* category, drawn mainly from themes 4 and 5, proposes that giving should be carried out in faith, trusting God for his provision. The dimension is stressed that such financial increase will be dependent upon hearing reliably from God and on

¹⁹⁴ It can further be observed that, notwithstanding the risk of oversimplification, category 1, the *righteousness* category is supported by scriptures in the early part of the OT (e.g. Deuteronomy 28 – indicating that blessings follow obedience to God’s commandments), whilst category 2 on *wisdom* is supported mainly in Proverbs (teaching through Solomon the wisdom that made him one of the richest people who ever lived), and category 3 on *faith* is supported by the teaching of the NT. Consequently, there may also be some justification for tiering these three categories.

responding in faith and trust, whilst also forming a specific expectancy regarding the desired outcome. It is suggested that giving represents a sacrifice, and if faith is maintained, this will lead to a fruitful outcome. Thus faith holds financial provision on trust making it available to others as the Lord may lead. Finally, as Barth taught, modest faith can do what is impossible, noting that it produces a positive attitude causing one to remain unmoved by challenging circumstances whilst expecting a favourable outcome. This category draws upon the example of Abraham as a role model of faith, showing how his blessing, together with the promise of the Spirit, can turn barren situations into fruitful ones.

The consequence is that Word-faith prosperity teaching reasonably appears to give rise to a three category prosperity approach to financial increase, proposed here as an original contribution for improved Christian financial well-being and understanding. This three category approach also offers practical financial advice to all believers irrespective of their denominational allegiance. So, the *righteousness* and *wisdom* categories begin to suggest a strategy for financial improvement based on Word-faith and other prosperity teaching supported in the major tenets by the contemporary commentators. They appear to offer the prospect of better financial control, also enabling greater generosity which God may bless by easing the believer's poverty. In addition, where believers can summon a degree of faith, this categorised prosperity theology holds the prospect of increased prosperity for greater generosity as well as personal financial provision.

With this proposed categorised prosperity theology taking shape, attention is now turned in chapter 6 to the prosperity teaching of another group of non-related individuals referred to as non-Word-faith prosperity teachers who will also provide an additional dimension to this categorised approach. Thereafter, in chapter 7, the writings of the critics and commentators of Word-faith prosperity teachers will be evaluated to assess the validity of their criticisms and to provide an additional perspective on this categorised prosperity theology.

Chapter 6 – Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers

6.1. Introduction

The four selected non-Word-faith prosperity teachers introduced in chapter 2 (§2.5.) are the subject of this chapter. In chapter 3 a considered hermeneutical strategy was developed for the evaluation of the interpretation by all concerned, including the non-Word-faith teachers. The distinctive aspects of non-Word-faith teachings are here compared with Word-faith prosperity teaching considered in chapters 4 & 5. Non-Word-faith prosperity teaching is not particularly addressed by the critics and commentators whose views form the subject of chapter 7. Chapter 8 will consider the overall hermeneutical and theological assessment for the thesis, also focussing on those financial practices apparently approved by God and those of a secular nature. It also proposes a three category prosperity doctrine of benefit to Christians of diverse backgrounds.

The hermeneutical appraisal of the interpretation of each of the non-Word-faith prosperity teachers in this chapter will be based on the considered hermeneutical strategy derived in chapter 3. However, the Scripture principle is adopted more or less uniformly by Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers as the basis for all matters of faith and doctrine, yet not too strictly so as to dismiss varying interpretations of Scripture as recommended by Treier¹. Furthermore, all four non-Word-faith prosperity teachers analysed in this chapter select their supporting scriptures from most parts of the Bible with similarly thorough distribution. So this aspect ceases to be of interest for these teachers, since in no case could their teaching be regarded as based on a mere handful of scriptures as alleged by Perriman. Furthermore, since the considered hermeneutical strategy has been heavily quoted in chapters 3 – 5 no further systematic reference to the hermeneutical scholars of each of its aspects will necessarily be made in chapter 6 onwards.

6.2. The Distinctive Teachings of Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers

6.2.1. Introduction

These particular writers have been selected as representative of the range of teaching published mostly within the last ten years. In all, just four are presented here. It is evident that, unlike Word-faith prosperity teachers, they demonstrate a variety of rationales which they have adopted in examining financial prosperity, each with a

¹ Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 199-200

reasonable scriptural base, with also the perceived guidance of the Spirit.

The definition of non-Word-faith and Word-faith prosperity teachers is based upon two primary differences. Firstly, Word-faith teachers in general have a close association and appreciation of one another, as one has followed the teaching of another. For example, Kenneth Copeland was a disciple of Hagin for a time and Savelle was a disciple of Copeland, serving him in his ministry for some years. This is in marked contrast with non-Word-faith prosperity teachers who each developed their prosperity teaching independently producing different emphases. Secondly, the prosperity teaching first emerged from the Word-faith camp with initial works on the subject published from 1966 with Hagin to 1982 with Savelle. This is in contrast with non-Word-faith writers whose works on prosperity date from 1998 to 2011.

As to the interpretation of Scripture, there is probably more in common with their hermeneutical strategy, since both groups choose scriptures widely distributed throughout OT and NT, with probably the same degree of selectivity and clearly accepting the Scripture principle. They also tend to refer to a range of translations but perhaps not giving full attention to the genre of the OT texts particularly. Finally, with the Pentecostal/charismatic sympathies of both groups, they take full advantage of the Spirit's illumination of texts, sometimes to the exclusion of other valuable hermeneutical strategies. The difference in the two groups, therefore, is more concerned with the texts chosen and the emphases placed upon them than with different hermeneutical strategies.

6.2.2. Dr Pat Francis (b. 1953 approx.)

Introduction - Described as a 'humanitarian, pastor, president and founder of several charities and for-profit companies',² Francis was born in Jamaica acquiring essential values of charity and enterprise from her parents and graduated from the University of the West Indies in 1975. Following her doctorate she is now based in Toronto, Canada as pastor, ministry leader and leading business entrepreneur.

Her Teaching - Francis' prosperity teaching refers to the principles of life laid down in the creation narrative. She refers to Genesis 1:26-27 noting humans' creation in the image of God.³ She concludes that individuals were created with greater powers and abilities than generally recognised, most of which may remain undiscovered. She

² Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, back cover.

³ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 13.

asserts that one has the power of choice and the power to create,⁴ so a believer can create ‘worlds’ of success for all aspects of life. Francis refers to the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25) teaching a ‘law of creation’ as described,⁵ where one has the dimension of creating a new prosperous environment by what is spoken.

Francis teaches the principle of believing one will receive (Matt 7:7), for many apparently lack the essentials for life through not asking (James 4:2).⁶ Her foundational scripture shows that if you believe you receive, you will (Mark 11:24).⁷ Matthew 21:22 teaches the same principle.⁸ The radical point she makes is that one may ask whatever one wishes and it will be granted (John 14:13-14, 15:7, 16:23-24).⁹ When asking why Christians are not all regularly asking for divine provision, the answer is found in 1 John 5:14-15 where Francis advises that asking must be in line with God’s will and with the right motive. The implication is that the desires of one’s heart will be God-given, if they are from pure motives, thus ensuring that they will be granted.¹⁰ Cho similarly described praying for three items needed for his ministry without success until God impressed upon him that his prayers should be specific to be answered.¹¹ He then did so and was successful in his prayers.

Francis sums up her steps for acquiring one’s desires from God, firstly by trusting the faithfulness of God (Ps 138:2) to enable participation in Christ’s victory.¹² Secondly, as mentioned, the believer should ask (John 16:24), and thirdly believe that there will be an answer to the request. Francis suggests believing for one’s wealth is a decision, not a feeling (Mark 9:23).¹³ Fourthly, she asserts that one rules through declaration (Mark 11:23, Romans 10:8-11). Fifthly, receiving involves believing it is received even before its arrival whilst making some practical preparation (Mark 11:24).¹⁴

In Genesis, land is regarded as the essential requirement for being fruitful and multiplying (Gen 1:27-30),¹⁵ so people worked on the land where God’s blessing

⁴ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 13.

⁵ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 15, 21.

⁶ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 65.

⁷ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 66.

⁸ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 69.

⁹ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 73.

¹⁰ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 77-79.

¹¹ Paul Yonggi Cho, *The Fourth Dimension* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1979) 10-13.

¹² Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 129, 139.

¹³ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 140.

¹⁴ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 141.

¹⁵ Pat Francis, *Achieving New Levels of Prosperity* (Toronto: Pat Francis Ministries, n.d.) 23.

brought prosperity (Prov 10:4, 1 Thes 4:11-12).¹⁶ Francis traces land's importance as an inheritance (Prov 13:22) and a sign of God's blessing (Psalm 37:22), as well as providing wealth.¹⁷ It was apparently central to God's covenant with Abraham, since he was commanded to go to a specific location, where he would be blessed with prosperity (Gen 12:1-3).¹⁸ Francis also notes that, just as Abraham prospered, so contemporary Christians, as Abraham's heirs, may expect to prosper (Gal 3:29). And just as Isaac inherited the land, so must believers use the land, or its contemporary equivalent, working it successfully, since the curse has been reversed in Christ.¹⁹ Francis therefore effectively makes the transition from OT to NT implying that for contemporary believers the concept of 'land' in her teaching becomes whatever means of income they may have.

6.2.3. Hermeneutical Evaluation of Francis' Interpretation

No overt reference is made by Francis to the author's intent as distinct from the meaning she placed on the text itself. However, she makes full use of the meaning/significance distinction. For example, when quoting Genesis 1:26-7 the author's meaning is taught concerning being created in the image and likeness of God, but Francis makes the significance much broader in asserting that believers have greater powers than realized or utilised.²⁰ However, with NT references such as 1 John 5:14-15, the significance she applies is completely in keeping with the author's intent.²¹

Regarding the use of English translations, Francis uses a reasonable range of versions including the New International Version, the New King James Version and the Authorized Version to support her teaching,²² so it is fairly free of antiquated language. With regard to genre and historical context, her method of interpretation makes little overt use of these aspects although there may well be an intuitive allowance for them. Similarly, her principles for the transition from OT to NT and beyond are implied rather than explicit with the general conviction that any scripture ought to be regarded as a legitimate basis for teaching to contemporary believers.

¹⁶ Francis, *New Levels of Prosperity*, 25.

¹⁷ Francis, *New Levels of Prosperity*, 26.

¹⁸ Francis, *New Levels of Prosperity*, 29.

¹⁹ Francis, *New Levels of Prosperity*, 30.

²⁰ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 13.

²¹ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 79.

²² Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 4.

Overall Appraisal – Francis uses a wide range of scriptures to support her teaching from Genesis 1:26 to 3 John 2. She would not fall foul of Perriman’s criticisms of Word-faith teachers that their teaching is based on only a handful of scriptures.²³ In addition, like other teachers in this chapter, she has a firm belief in the Scripture principal, trusting it for matters of faith and doctrine,²⁴ yet not so strictly as to dismiss varying interpretations of Scripture, as recommended by Treier.²⁵ Her emphasis on the role of land in OT economics and its application to contemporary believers is significant, involving some analogical application, but also with direct application for individual prosperity today.²⁶ With such a view there is agreement with a minority group of commentators on Acts who regard the sale of land to provide for food as a failed experiment which left Judean believers unable to cope with the famine referred to in Acts 11:27-30, having sacrificed their land.²⁷ As to the three category prosperity theology, Francis contributes to the *faith* category that believing for one’s wealth is an important decision to make and that one should believe one is a recipient of it. This *faith* element is based on the teaching that believers are heirs of Abraham and should expect to prosper.

6.2.4. Clive Pick – (d.o.b. not available)

Introduction – Born in London, Pick’s background includes working in the police force and latterly as a Pentecostal minister. Twenty years ago or more he sensed a calling to Ontario Canada, where his ministry in Christian finance has continued. Pick offers three basic foundational principles of Christian finance.

His Teaching - Tithing, he suggests, activates the covenant blessings,²⁸ and protects one financially.²⁹ The tithe is regarded as an expression of appreciation for God’s provision, recognizing that he owns all things.³⁰ Pick regards Tithing as an act of faith in God’s provision for the future. His distinct emphasis suggests that where people tithe there is an absence of demonic interference, as expressed by the phrase ‘opens

²³ Perriman, *Faith & Prosperity*, 84.

²⁴ Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 11.

²⁵ Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 199-200.

²⁶ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 328; McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 163-4.

²⁷ See Everett F. Harrison, *Interpreting Acts: The Expanding Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1986 [1975]) 75; W A Criswell, *Acts: an Exposition Volume 1* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978) 113-119.

²⁸ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 11, 12.

²⁹ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 14.

³⁰ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 29.

the windows of heaven' (Mal 3:10);³¹ and he emphasizes that tithing should be done accurately.³² He reports that only 20% of churches tithe in this way, so 80% miss out on the protection offered.³³

Pick teaches that God's material blessings require honesty in one's finances. He highlights God's instruction to Abraham to be blameless as a condition of the covenant of blessing between them (Gen 17:1-2). Pick advises that one deals with financial discrepancies giving the devil no opportunity, or as Solomon puts it 'catch the little foxes that are ruining the vines' (Song of Sol 2:15).³⁴ Thus financial integrity positions one for blessing.³⁵ The blessing is passed on to all around, not just for one's own needs but also providing blessing for others (Gen 22:18).³⁶

With these two aspects in place, Pick advises that offerings will increase one's financial provision.³⁷ There is evidence that the first offering out of hardship begins to ease the financial pressure.³⁸ Pick emphasizes the different function that offerings and tithing have, for God measures one's increase back on the basis of the offerings made.³⁹ Furthermore, Pick traces the principle of seed-time and harvest back to Genesis 8:22, as a fundamental principle of life, also supported by Paul's teaching on this topic (2 Cor 9:6).⁴⁰ Pick assures his readers that God returns more than is sown, regardless of the world's economy. Indeed, in some cases it may reach a hundredfold return on the investment (Matt 13:8). Although similar to Word-faith prosperity teaching, his distinct contribution is the other two preliminary steps which facilitate success.

'Open Heaven' refers to the protection provided through regular and accurate tithing, where God sends his followers prosperity, granted through an anointing (Deut 8:18).⁴¹ Pick suggests, with apparently little scriptural support, that principalities and powers can hold back financial blessings, whose power is broken by tithing.⁴² Pick

³¹ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 29.

³² Pick, *Open Heaven*, 30.

³³ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 30.

³⁴ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 13.

³⁵ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 14.

³⁶ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 15.

³⁷ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 14.

³⁸ Numerous testimonies on CBN's 700 Club programme.

³⁹ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 31.

⁴⁰ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 32.

⁴¹ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 67.

⁴² Pick, *Open Heaven*, 49.

emphasises the communal effect, where a whole congregation tithes, so all the evil powers are disabled and it operates free from demonic constraint (Mal 3:10).⁴³ This is implied by the ‘open the windows of heaven’ and ‘rebuke the devourer for you’ phrases from this verse, and refers to the prayers of a group of believers. However, Pick is something of a lone voice here, despite the powerful incentive to tithing implied.

6.2.5. Hermeneutical Evaluation of Pick’s Interpretation

Pick makes little overt reference to the author’s intent in his interpretation. In Genesis 8:22 which he quotes there is a reference to seed-time and harvest as a principle for the natural world, which would be the author’s intent.⁴⁴ Pick then takes up this theme to apply it to planting financial seeds, not intended by the author of Genesis, but clearly intended by Paul who was teaching on this very subject in 2 Corinthians 9:6 also quoted by Pick.⁴⁵ So, in these examples there appears to be due attention to the author’s intent. Pick’s drawing of significance from the surface meaning can at times appear to be inappropriate. For example when referring to the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-2), he draws the significance that one should give offerings to God which appears to trivialise this scripture which should have more weighty application.⁴⁶ Also the significance of the *open heaven* drawn from Malachi 3:10 seems doubtful because the expression ‘opening the windows of heaven’ apparently implies bountiful provision rather than freedom from demonic interference. He implies that this occurs when all members of a congregation tithe which seems to be without scriptural support at all.⁴⁷ Regarding the use of various translations, Pick appears to refer to only one, the New King James Version.⁴⁸ Being a more modern translation he avoids the use of antiquated language but the use of a range of translations would facilitate various shades of meaning of which he has taken no advantage. Like most of the prosperity teachers, Pick makes little reference to genre or historical context, yet he does draw his supporting scriptures from most parts of the Bible including many from the OT. Indeed, most of his central concepts are based on OT scriptures, for he refers to the blessings of God as recorded in Deuteronomy 8:18 where God gives believers the

⁴³ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 49-50.

⁴⁴ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 31.

⁴⁵ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 32.

⁴⁶ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 13.

⁴⁷ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 49-50.

⁴⁸ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 2.

‘power to get wealth’ as part of his covenant with Israel.⁴⁹ He then goes on to refer to this verse, adding that this covenant promise is still the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8), without reference to the change of covenant or to the new place in redemption history.

Regarding the transition from OT to NT Pick quotes numerous OT texts for direct application to contemporary believers in support of his tithe, righteous dealings and offerings advice. He therefore seems to subscribe to the same simplistic contractual hermeneutic as displayed by Word-faith prosperity teachers, drawing the basic OT tenet on giving and using it to justify radical giving among contemporary believers. Some things make the transition easily such as tithing as an expression of faith in God which is clear from both the OT and the NT. But much of his teaching on this subject comes from Malachi 3:10 which seems inadequate to support the main thrust of his argument.⁵⁰ Concerning the Spirit and interpretation, there is little direct evidence for this hermeneutical aspect. However, in writing his book he sensed a God-given commissioning to assist believers in re-activating the covenant of blessing as with Abraham.⁵¹ Consequently, it is probable that he would claim the Spirit’s illumination in applying OT scriptures on the blessing of Abraham to contemporary believers.

Overall Appraisal – This is a far more direct and basic approach to these scriptures than with the other prosperity teachers and involves a substantial base in OT texts with appropriate application to contemporary believers. When Pick quotes from the life of Abraham, with reference to Malachi 3:10-11, he teaches a basic OT tenet regarding faithful giving to enable greater giving as portrayed in the NT. However, quoting the sacrifice of Isaac as support for this is hard to accept and appears to trivialise a scripture having more significant application.⁵² Some may consider his teaching on the three heavens to be inconsistent with scriptural use also.⁵³ Pick’s choice of topics, however, does facilitate the change of genre from OT to NT, which, according to McCartney and Clayton as well as Cotterell and Turner, requires careful

⁴⁹ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 67, 74.

⁵⁰ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 30

⁵¹ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 11.

⁵² Pick, *Open Heaven*, 13.

⁵³ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 46-50; i.e. 1st heaven, *the heavenlies* (Eph 6:12), 2nd heaven, *the heavens*, sky or universe, 3rd heaven, *heaven*, where God’s throne is (2 Cor 12:2-3) particularly at odds with Pick’s 2nd heaven which he regards as *the heavenlies*.

contextualisation.⁵⁴ Pick's transition from OT to NT is simpler because the reference to tithing as an expression of faith in God's ongoing provision is well known and accepted by Pentecostal/charismatic believers. Also a blameless walk is well understood in either connection requiring little contextualisation. Furthermore the seedtime and harvest concept he refers to (Genesis 8) is also clearly taught in 2 Corinthians 9:6 leaving only the debate as its material or spiritual nature.

Pick's application of the *open heaven* teaching is an unusual application of Malachi 3:10-11. The Authorised Version refers to opening the windows of heaven and pouring out a blessing, the context clearly being agrarian with the implication of abundant rain and fruitful ground. The application of this text to contemporary believers must therefore refer to their current sources of income in primarily an industrial and commercial setting. However, use of the phrase *open heaven* to refer to freedom from demonic interference is hard to justify. Furthermore, there is no scriptural support either for the perceived *open heaven* being achievable when all members of a given congregation tithe. If *open heaven* is an analogy, there may be some justification for Pick's application.⁵⁵ The tithe, then, according to his teaching would be the means of ensuring angelic assistance against demonic interference with a person's finances.

With regard to the three category prosperity classification, Pick majors on the *righteousness* category, calling for honesty in one's financial dealings as a prerequisite for divine favour in them. This, together with diligence in tithing is seen as positioning oneself for financial blessings from God.

6.2.6. Gary Keesee (d.o.b. not available)

Introduction – Born in New Albany, Ohio and trained at Oral Roberts University, Oklahoma, Keesee writes from the perspective of one who was born again, yet deeply in debt. In the midst of his distress he sensed God's word from Philippians 4:19 that he would provide for his needs.⁵⁶ His aim then became to understand how what he describes as 'God's financial system' may work, leading him to Genesis, discovering how the earth became cursed (Gen 3:17-19). He concluded that, in an 'earth-curse

⁵⁴ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 223; Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 99.

⁵⁵ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 328.

⁵⁶ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 17-25; www.linkedin.com/pub/gary-keesee/4a/71/993 accessed on 4.8.13.

system', human effort could not succeed.⁵⁷ One has to transfer one's financial dealings from that system into God's perceived financial practice.

His Teaching - Keesee developed five steps to financial increase recommending firstly choosing something to be transferred from the 'earth-curse system' to God's domain,⁵⁸ and secondly, laying hands on the gift and through prayer, releasing it to God's purposes (Luke 6:38). Thirdly, he taught being sensitive to the plan of the Spirit, who will show the believer where the provision is. It may take the form of an idea, a concept or a plan revealed.⁵⁹ The fourth step is to implement the plan quickly avoiding procrastination.⁶⁰ Fifthly, Keesee refers to gathering the fragments, watching out for little things easily overlooked which could be the source of increase (Matt 14:20).

Keesee also provides five rules for debt cancellation. Firstly, one must study the laws of God's kingdom, whilst secondly, trusting God and avoiding debt (Matt 6:33, Rom 12:2).⁶¹ Thirdly, he advises severing one's opportunity to incur debt.⁶² Fourthly, giving should alleviate the impoverished situation (2 Cor 6:11). Finally he recommends writing a plan for debt reduction. He recommends creating a surplus in one's budget, emphasising that money of itself is not a sufficient goal. Indeed, it has its only purpose in funding one's aims and purposes.⁶³ Thus, by applying principles of God's kingdom, Keesee suggests that the believer can access divine provision.⁶⁴

6.2.7 Hermeneutical Evaluation of Keesee's Interpretation

Keesee does not refer specifically to the author's intended meaning when interpreting Scripture but gives the apparent meaning of the words used by the author in question. He sees a clear, unambiguous meaning from the example of Matthew 6:33, that seeking God should take first place in the believer's life.⁶⁵ This is of general application but has a particularly appropriate application to the area of Christian prosperity, warning all concerned to avoid the love of money. Also, although there are ambiguities regarding sowing and reaping money with some scriptures, when he

⁵⁷ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 97-98.

⁵⁸ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 98-104.

⁵⁹ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 106.

⁶⁰ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 106.

⁶¹ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 114-116.

⁶² Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 117.

⁶³ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 131-210, 237-242.

⁶⁴ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 117.

⁶⁵ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 113.

quotes 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, the meaning is clear as expressed by the author, Paul, that sowing and reaping does indeed legitimately apply to financial giving and receiving.⁶⁶

Jesus' words as recorded in Luke 6:38 declare that there will be generous returns for those who give to others.⁶⁷ The significance applied to this scripture is that this includes money and material gifts in addition to the usual concept of time, love and attention. There is no information on the right way to give but simply that giving will always be rewarded. Keesee quotes Romans 12:2 on renewing the mind giving its significance as having a new mind-set with regard to money.⁶⁸ The point is that people have adopted worldly attitudes to money and he teaches that there is a new Christian way to approach one's financial dealings in keeping with the Christian message and distanced from worldly financial attitudes. This is a new and important change of mind-set enabling the believer to manage finances God's way. Keesee has not apparently taken advantage of the use of several translations as some of the Word-faith prosperity teachers have. He almost always quotes from the New International Version which does of course avoid antiquated terminology, but he only occasionally takes advantage of the different shades of meaning as would be expressed were a range of versions to be in use.⁶⁹

Keesee is careful to show the genre and the historical context regarding what at first sight appears to be an isolated Proverb such as Proverbs 10:22.⁷⁰ He also shows its place in redemption history, revealing that the blessing of the Lord redeems from the curse and its associated requirement of hard labour for disappointing returns.⁷¹ Thus the blessing of the Lord brings wealth because hard labour is no longer required in Christ. From this verse and with an appreciation of its context he convincingly arrives at his distinction between the 'earth-curse system' and God's 'blessed financial system'.⁷² However, in his interpretation of 2 Corinthians 9:5-11, Keesee makes no mention of the historical setting to this passage but rather assumes a knowledge of the context of encouraged generosity to other believers with its promised abundance.⁷³

As mentioned, Keesee makes a successful transition from OT to NT regarding the

⁶⁶ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 118.

⁶⁷ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 105.

⁶⁸ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 114.

⁶⁹ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 4.

⁷⁰ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 97.

⁷¹ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 98.

⁷² Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 98-9.

⁷³ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 118-9.

curse, originating from the Garden of Eden and the blessing with its financial associations originating from the blessing of Abraham and available to contemporary believers in Christ.⁷⁴ However, the transition is less apparent in his treatment of Elisha and the widow (2 Kings 4:1-7).⁷⁵ The woman's experience of the miraculous while pouring the oil into borrowed vessels is deemed to advocate the starting of businesses as a means of receiving God-given finance. This may be a legitimate example, but there is no allowance for change of covenant from OT to NT which a more convincing interpretation would probably include. Keesee does attest to the leading of the Spirit in applying 2 Kings 4:1-7 to his personal life, sensing a call to form a new business in response to it. This may qualify as a Spirit-inspired significance, as also apparent in his response to Philippians 4:19, where he felt encouraged to ascertain from Scripture the principles of God's financial dealings.⁷⁶

Overall, Keesee's hermeneutics are reasonably consistent with the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3, majoring on diverse significances from the scriptures chosen, oftentimes with a sense of Spirit-inspired significance. The selection of texts may also be Spirit-inspired to some extent. He gives some attention to genre and the transition from OT to NT but also does subscribe to a similar simplistic contractual hermeneutics as with Word-faith prosperity teachers. There is little or no reference to typology or analogy in applying OT scriptures to contemporary believers.

Overall Appraisal – Keesee draws on a range of scriptures from the OT and the NT and develops the concept of two conflicting financial systems based on Matthew 6:33 and Romans 8:2 and 12:2. Financial blessing is taught through Proverbs 10:22 and from 2 Kings 4:1-7 with the miraculous in business. However, Keesee provides little justification for applying Elisha's experience to contemporary Christians. His teaching is reasonably based on Scripture as a whole, despite the fact that he could do more to demonstrate the transition from OT to NT.⁷⁷ However, Keesee's teaching is based primarily upon NT scriptures, minimising this weakness. Moreover, his approach may be justified in terms of *sensus plenior*, as McCartney and Clayton have

⁷⁴ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 97-9.

⁷⁵ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 169-71.

⁷⁶ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 25-6, 170-1.

⁷⁷ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 328; McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 163.

explained.⁷⁸ They warn of the danger that the contemporary interpreter may read too much into the OT text. It is difficult to assess in any objective sense whether this would be accepted as the pneumatological imagination as taught by Yong or wishful thinking.⁷⁹ However, a significant number of followers have valued his insights perceiving a Spirit-led interpretation, providing, as Yong suggested, that community to endorse the genuineness of the Spirit's illumination, even though his followers may not quite be the scholarly community Yong had in mind.⁸⁰ So Keesee is teaching from the gospels and letters with the OT for illustrative purposes, relying on the illumination of the Spirit, which appears to be a sensible arrangement. In his case, there is little recourse to obscure OT scriptures, so problems with change of genre are minimal. This makes his teaching a reasonable interpretation of Scripture, although the choice of texts is typically selective, as with most prosperity teachers. Thus Keesee enlarges upon the *wisdom* category of the three category prosperity theology, encouraging believers to avoid debt and to adhere to God's principles of financial planning and by avoiding the world's financial practices, all assisted by the renewing of the mind.

6.2.8. Stephen K. De Silva (d.o.b. not available)

Introduction – De Silva, based in Redding California, began his career in 1985 as a certified accountant and moved to his post at Bethel church in 1996, where his concern for financial release and personal development was birthed. As the title, *Money and the Prosperous Soul*, suggests, his book is based upon 3 John 2, suggesting how financial prosperity may be as much a matter of the heart as of financial expertise.⁸¹ Thus he suggests the soul requires healing from a lack of self-worth allowing dreams to surface whilst also affirming that nothing is impossible with God (Mark 10:27).⁸² This is related to the change in thinking described in Romans 12:2 as the renewing of the mind.⁸³ He regards 3 John 2 as a prayer of alignment, whereby health and prosperity are raised to the level of the soul's spiritual condition, a process which requires confession and agreement with Scripture.⁸⁴ Accordingly, it is appropriate to work on one's soul, building one's self-worth, hope and expectation for good (Mark

⁷⁸ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 164.

⁷⁹ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 222.

⁸⁰ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 282-5.

⁸¹ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 25.

⁸² De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 20-25.

⁸³ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 20-25.

⁸⁴ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 26, 29.

8:36).

His Teaching - Quoting C. S. Lewis, De Silva teaches that the devil often sends opposing pairs of errors, so that in avoiding one error one is in danger of falling into the other.⁸⁵ Thus the prosperous soul must follow a path between two major hazards: poverty and mammon. A number of respected historical figures have advocated poverty as a desirable condition, producing in believers a substantial distrust of financial abundance. De Silva perceptively advises that the spirit of poverty manifests in fear and hoarding, whilst generosity is choked.⁸⁶ The prosperous soul takes an opposing position not being anxious, loving to bless and is content and secure.⁸⁷ This transformation is seen in the change of name from Jacob to Israel (Gen 25: 10), and requires for believers, honesty and an acknowledgement of one's lack (Matt 5: 3).

De Silva views the spirit of mammon on the other hand as a personification of money taken to be one's security. It is a form of idolatry.⁸⁸ Mammon is regarded as preoccupation with material possessions, producing self-aggrandisement. De Silva suggests that this spirit is attracted to people with such an attitude producing sensuality. However, such a person is separated from the cross, from one's adoption as a son and from one's purpose.⁸⁹ So he advises to stop loving money, as seen when Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler (Matt 9:16-22), for De Silva teaches that God gives power to fulfil his purposes for the individual (Deut 8:18).⁹⁰

De Silva notices that people are in financial bondage with a debt-based economy, especially in times of financial recession and it is very common for people to mishandle money.⁹¹ This is because a prosperous soul is needed to receive and use abundant finance wisely and he notices that lottery winners often fare poorly for this reason.⁹² He regards money as a form of power for believers providing solutions.⁹³ He refers to Joseph as a prosperous and successful man whilst a slave and prisoner,⁹⁴ being capable of administering the vast riches of Egypt wisely and successfully. He suggests that God shapes believers through their circumstances, believing they should

⁸⁵ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 129, quoting C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

⁸⁶ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 62, 63.

⁸⁷ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 67-71.

⁸⁸ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 130.

⁸⁹ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 132-134.

⁹⁰ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 137-138.

⁹¹ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 37-40.

⁹² De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 59.

⁹³ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 47.

⁹⁴ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 48.

never see themselves as victims but as fulfilling God's purposes for their lives.

De Silva declares that money should be regarded as the means to accomplish greater things, as with Joseph, who became a supernatural steward of the riches of his kingdom (Gen 41:41-49).⁹⁵ As De Silva affirms believers can steward the riches of heaven, requiring a prosperous soul to carry wealth and to direct God's resources.⁹⁶ De Silva also teaches that renewing the mind will cause one to establish different priorities, to create a surplus for acts of generosity (Rom 12:2).⁹⁷ This readjustment of purpose gives a key to financial blessing. It notes Solomon's relationship with God, where wisdom, produced prosperity.⁹⁸ Therefore a person in this position must resist the fear of man, thus guarding intimacy with God. The people one serves must not be the priority.⁹⁹

6.2.9. Hermeneutical Evaluation of De Silva's Interpretation

It is apparent that De Silva's whole book is focussed on determining the author's intended meaning of the 'prosperous soul' in 3 John 2.¹⁰⁰ This mode of expression is found nowhere else in Scripture, but De Silva searches out the meaning and application of this term to involve something akin to an appropriate self-worth as a preliminary to receiving divine provision. Thus, there is a natural link to the non-Word-faith concept of renewing the mind as described in Romans 12:2.¹⁰¹ Here the significance is that in-built presuppositions about money have to change to participate in God's financial principles. There is therefore both an awareness of the author's intent and a convincing derivation of significance from these and similar texts for contemporary believers.

De Silva has also followed McCartney and Clayton's recommendation to consult a variety of translations to take advantage of the range of meanings given to a particular text. De Silva quotes the New American Standard Bible, the Amplified Bible, the English Standard Version, the Message, the Authorized and the New King James Version, as well as the New International Version.¹⁰² In so doing he accesses a wide range of scholarship and also takes advantage of translations with both formal and

⁹⁵ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 163.

⁹⁶ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 164.

⁹⁷ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 52-3.

⁹⁸ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 165, 170.

⁹⁹ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 170-172.

¹⁰⁰ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 26.

¹⁰¹ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 25.

¹⁰² De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 8.

dynamic equivalence.

There is some attention shown to the concepts of genre and historical context. For example, he quotes a number of proverbs which, although isolated, form part of what he perceives to be God's principles for financial dealings. He quotes Proverbs 4:23 and 23:7 to demonstrate two aspects of financial prosperity identified elsewhere in Scripture.¹⁰³ He allows for the genre of Proverbs and yet applies them consistently to contemporary believers making the transition from OT to NT expressed as a change from external control of behaviour to the internal change of heart consistent with the new covenant.

The transition from OT to NT is sensitively negotiated by De Silva. He quotes the change of name from Jacob to Israel as an OT example of the renewed mind.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, he quotes Deuteronomy 8:18 describing the power to get wealth noting that it is a covenant matter, but by the same token this verse indicates in his view that the wealth is also for covenant or kingdom purposes.¹⁰⁵ The money thus acquired is seen to have the new covenant purpose of building relationships with others, both believers and non-believers. In addition, there is no overt reference to the transition from OT to NT, but the application of such texts is careful and adjusted to new covenant issues.

The role of the Spirit in interpretation does not receive specific mention in that way but there is ample reference to the Spirit's guidance in drawing certain scriptures to the author's attention and in perceiving their contemporary application. For example, the renewing of the mind over financial issues as supported by Romans 12:2 is seen to have considerable Spirit-inspired significance.¹⁰⁶ The new mind-set, then, is perceived to be one that carefully creates a surplus, restraining selfish expenditure accordingly, in order to be a blessing to others. This then enables the financial rewards for such generosity to be more clearly seen.

Overall Appraisal – De Silva's hermeneutics give reasonable weight to the issues of author's intent and significance with a significant reliance upon the Spirit's illumination in interpretation whilst not neglecting to provide some attention to genre, historical context and the transition from OT to NT and also benefitting from a range

¹⁰³ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 24-5.

¹⁰⁴ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 71-2.

¹⁰⁵ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 138.

¹⁰⁶ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 52-3.

of translations with their different emphases and modes of expression.

De Silva's declared aim is the transformation of the soul to access the prosperity of 3 John 2, avoiding both the poverty mentality and the love of money in the process. He claims to offer scriptural guidance on the transition towards a prosperity mind-set. De Silva's work usefully makes the point that money is a tool for disclosing matters of the soul.¹⁰⁷ Although his teaching may appear to be based upon just one verse of Scripture (3 John 2), he does expound a range of scriptures from OT and the NT, giving the view of Scripture as a whole in keeping with Treier.¹⁰⁸ It would certainly not be based upon only a few scriptures as Perriman might allege.¹⁰⁹ Certainly, OT scriptures are freely applied to NT situations with little attempt to explain the difference between their content as recommended by Hirsch, for when applying OT to NT situations, the rules (see §3.7.) are very much taken for granted.¹¹⁰ When Joseph and Solomon are quoted for example, the implications for contemporary believers are not demonstrated.¹¹¹ There is a legitimate search for *sensus plenior*, which permits new areas of significance or application for the core meaning of the text, which occur through the illumination of the Spirit.

As to the three category prosperity classification, De Silva adds considerably to the *wisdom* category, suggesting the involvement of thinking well of oneself whilst avoiding the two opposing errors of a poverty mentality or of making wealth one's central focus. The prosperous soul, otherwise referred to as the prosperity mentality, enables one to handle finance better, so one may create a surplus for charitable donations. Furthermore, De Silva legitimately advises that a renewed mind, yet another perspective on the prosperous soul, enables one to handle finances God's way referred to as a 'kingdom prosperity mind-set'.

6.3. Hermeneutical Evaluation of Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Themes

6.3.1. Introduction

Three distinct features of the teaching of the four representative teachers assessed in §6.2. are studied here, representing significant areas of agreement. The appraisals at the end of §§6.2.2.-5. have evaluated the hermeneutical strategy of each teacher. The

¹⁰⁷ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 26.

¹⁰⁸ Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 199-200.

¹⁰⁹ Perriman, *Faith & Prosperity*, 84.

¹¹⁰ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1-13, 103-26.

¹¹¹ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 222.

themes studied here arise where there are common scriptures between two or more of the teachers involved. These areas of concordance are again assessed using the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 with support from commentators of these scriptures. It will also be important to take into account any current interpretation not previously supported.

6.3.2. Theme 1 – God Regarded as the Source of Supply

Introduction – This theme is that believers should turn to God for their financial supply following his methods rather than the world's system, relying as it does upon debt. There are references to Matthew 6:33 with its theme of seeking God's kingdom first, and Philippians 4:19, in which Paul assures his readers that God will supply their needs, including financial ones.

Matthew 6:33

As Taught by Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – Francis quotes this verse indicating the need to put God's interest first turning to him for financial provision.¹¹² Keesee quotes this verse to draw attention to Jesus' teaching on two contrasting kingdoms, where the believer must pursue an understanding of the principles underlying the kingdom of God, including a commitment to God's way of dealing with personal debt.¹¹³ He suggests finding one's God-given purpose and learning how his kingdom works financially.¹¹⁴

Comments on the Non-Word-Faith Interpretation of Matthew 6:33 – Regarding Matthew's intent, this is clearly seen as a commandment to make God one's central focus and source of supply. Seeking first his kingdom is taken to include specific financial principles and methodology which the believer must learn. This would therefore represent significance consistent with the meaning but extended well beyond the purview of this particular text. The other significance drawn by Francis is that such activity necessitates the abandonment of worldly practices regarding one's finances because they can involve bondage emanating from the kingdom of darkness. So this verse may reasonably be applied as it is to successfully extricating oneself from debt.

As to genre, this text is from a gospel where the teaching of Jesus is reasonably

¹¹² Pat Francis, *End-Time Release and Increase* (Toronto: Admarie International Inc., 2012 [2003]) 42.

¹¹³ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 113.

¹¹⁴ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 243-4.

applicable to contemporary believers. Furthermore, the possible different place in redemption history is not taken to be significant by the authors concerned in interpreting this verse. The illumination of the Spirit is not overtly referred to, but the authors would no doubt ascribe the special application of the verse to his guidance and inspiration, in the formation of convincing and coherent deeper meaning to this text in the area of Christian prosperity teaching, subject of course to the endorsement of the Christian/Pentecostal community.

Support by the Commentators – Barth suggested that seeking the kingdom implied loving one's neighbour and loving God, which ensured one's needs were met.¹¹⁵ He added that since the Father knows the things we have need of there can be no ground for anxiety, since Jesus has won the victory.¹¹⁶ There is therefore no basis for human endeavour or action here. Furthermore, he added that one only has to love and be self-giving to God and one's fellows to be assured of material supply. This, he said, is the way of *agape*.¹¹⁷ Hagner sees this verse as an argument for avoiding anxiety, rather than supporting belief in an alternative financial system.¹¹⁸ He advocates a single-minded commitment to the kingdom of God, requiring righteousness in all areas of life, including, it is inferred, righteous financial dealings.¹¹⁹ Morris saw that 'a disciple's first and best effort is to be directed towards God's kingdom, not any personal needs'.¹²⁰ He also suggested that seeking the kingdom involves submission to God's will.¹²¹ Morris quoted Lloyd-Jones who saw this as an on-going experience for believers and not just as an initial conversion experience.¹²² The righteousness in question was regarded as right standing before God which only he can give.¹²³ Turner agrees that freedom from anxiety is the underlying principle behind this text and requires concern for God's affairs and for a righteous lifestyle.¹²⁴ It is a paradox to which many prosperity teachers subscribe, that less anxiety concerning personal supply appears to ensure greater divine provision.¹²⁵ Not only is anxiety unpleasant, it is also counterproductive regarding personal benefit. Turner suggests, 'The Father

¹¹⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.3, 593.

¹¹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.2, 469.

¹¹⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.2, 750-1.

¹¹⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 161.

¹¹⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 165-6; Pick, *Open Heaven*, 12-13.

¹²⁰ Morris, *Gospel of Matthew*, 161.

¹²¹ Morris, *Gospel of Matthew*, 161.

¹²² Morris, *Gospel of Matthew*, 161, n.105.

¹²³ Morris, *Gospel of Matthew*, 162.

¹²⁴ Turner, *Matthew*, 200-1.

¹²⁵ Turner, *Matthew*, 201.

expects his children to put him first, but he delights in meeting their needs'.¹²⁶

Anxiety, then, undermines the believer's faith and puts God's endowment in jeopardy.

Conclusion – The main thrust of this verse is that God may be relied upon to provide for material needs, and this is generally supported by scholars and commentators. It adds the condition of requiring a righteous lifestyle and a primary focus on God's purposes. If there is a Christian financial system it would require righteousness and faith in God's provision, and it would discourage resorting to any unsustainable personal debt. It is unlikely that this verse could sustain belief in two financial systems one from God and one from the evil one since the verse contrasts seeking first the kingdom of God with the unwise practice of seeking one's own material blessings and provision. Nevertheless, there is a clear and legitimate conclusion that seeking God is a legitimate way of receiving divine provision.

Philippians 4:19

As Interpreted by Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers - Francis sees this verse as supporting the believer's expectation of divine provision, also advocating making it the basis of one's verbal declaration.¹²⁷ Keesee testifies that God brought this scripture to his mind when experiencing desperate shortage and serious debt. He observed that his needs were not being met, whereas this text said that they should be. Keesee concluded that there was something he needed to understand regarding God's kingdom to make it operate financially as promised. This marked the beginning of learning what he describes as the financial principles of God's kingdom.¹²⁸

Comments on the Interpretation of Philippians 4:19 – The author's intent with this scripture is clear and of direct application, conveying the meaning that God will provide for the needs of the believer. Neither teacher quoted appears to explain what level 'supply all your need' refers to and certainly there is no attempt to explain the source described as '(God's) riches in glory by Christ Jesus'. For no mention is made as to how they can be accessed by believers. Therefore, the only part of the biblical author's meaning taken up is the simple yet no doubt profound belief that God does and will provide for the needs of his people.

There is little reference to Spirit-inspired significance of this text apart from its

¹²⁶ Turner, *Matthew*, 201.

¹²⁷ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 141.

¹²⁸ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 25.

perceived invitation to begin to explore the principles upon which such divine provision may be accessed. As to genre, the Pauline epistle from which the text is drawn requires little transition to the contemporary believer, being a statement of direct application to believers. However, the historical context to this verse is important, for, as Paul points out, the Philippians had a longstanding record of generosity towards him, which appeared to be the basis upon which the promised divine supply was centred. However, neither author referred to this context in their teaching.

The illumination of the Spirit is apparent in Keesee's account where he perceives that God brought this scripture to mind, beginning his research into the topic of the principles governing God's financial dealings. The possible *deeper meaning* perceived by both authors is the discovery of how and under what conditions such divine provision may be expected.

Support by Commentators – Barth comments that 'God ... in his glory will be mindful of their needs', referring to his followers.¹²⁹ There is no reference to human actions causing such a response, but suggests a life lived unselfishly as its only possible prerequisite. Hawthorne and Martin took this verse to refer to 'present material needs' and not the blessings of the afterlife.¹³⁰ Also, they added that Paul was affirming what God will do rather than simply praying that it would be so.¹³¹ Bockmuehl comments that God supplies because the Philippians have 'fully provided' for Paul's needs (Phil 4:18) and God will meet their needs also.¹³² This explains the perceived crucial first step in debt reduction: giving to others, as supported by the various authors under examination. Bockmuehl suggests Paul regarded this not merely as reciprocity but believed God would provide over and above one's level of giving, albeit through human agencies, adding that God's provision will 'surpass every human need'.¹³³ O'Brien believes Paul was seeking the 'fruit that increases to [their] credit' causing God to meet their every need through the mediation of Christ.¹³⁴ This demonstrates,

¹²⁹ Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Philippians* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1962) 127.

¹³⁰ Gerald F. Hawthorne, and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 2004) 273.

¹³¹ Hawthorne & Martin, *Philippians*, 273.

¹³² Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: A & C Black {Publishers} Ltd., 1997) 266.

¹³³ Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 266.

¹³⁴ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991) 543.

he says, the contented dependence which Paul had found.¹³⁵ He concludes that God fully fulfils one's needs in compensation for generosity and pursuance of the kingdom.¹³⁶

Conclusion – Their interpretation of this scripture is reasonably consistent with non-Word-faith prosperity teaching in that God responds to a believer's devotion with divine provision as a sovereign act. However, the believer's generosity may express *faith* in God's ongoing provision, as expressed by Barth. Francis' and Keesee's teaching along those lines is reasonably consistent with a reliable hermeneutic. However, there is no overt support from commentators on the appropriateness of making requests from God, even though there is clear confirmation for the believer's supply being in the hands of God.

Prosperity Teaching Thus Substantiated - The references to 'seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness' provide a potential basis for prosperity teaching, implying obedience to his laws including tithing. This represents a primary prosperity principle in keeping with category 1 of the categorised prosperity strategy. The reference to 'his righteousness' implies honesty and integrity in financial dealings, as a further prerequisite for divine provision where 'all these things' are granted. These two principles are broadly in keeping with Pick's first two requirements for receiving the blessings of God.¹³⁷

In Philippians 4:19 Paul responded to a particular pastoral matter declaring that their generosity assured them of God's material blessing. This context must be borne in mind when applying this verse to contemporary believers. As Hirsch and Osborne have taught, there is a meaning in the context of the biblical scenario, implying the significance for believers today, where the context in the scripture must be taken into account.¹³⁸

From theme 1, the *righteousness* category is supported by the teaching that obedience in financial matters includes tithing as well as honesty and integrity in handling money. Furthermore, the *faith* category is confirmed in that generosity is taught as an expression of faith in God's ongoing provision.

¹³⁵ O'Brien, *Philippians*, 544.

¹³⁶ O'Brien, *Philippians*, 545.

¹³⁷ Pick, *Open Heaven*, 11-13.

¹³⁸ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 103-26; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23.

6.3.3. Theme 2 – Asking for Blessing

Introduction –The verses quoted most often are 1 Chronicles 4:10 and Proverbs 10:22, suggesting that we like Jabez may ask God for many blessings because the Lord blesses his people with true riches and not sorrow.

1 Chronicles 4:10

As Interpreted by Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers - This verse from the midst of the genealogies of 1 Chronicles appears to support asking for blessing and Wilkinson based an entire book upon it, suggesting that Jabez wanted to do more for God and regarded this prayer was the means of achieving it.¹³⁹ It was a prayer God answered favourably, suggesting that he would significantly raise a believer's level of prosperity. De Silva took this scripture to be an encouragement to pray and to ask for blessings, taking it to be of direct application to believers today.¹⁴⁰ Yet he also combined such asking with acts of generosity as he felt moved by God. Francis, too, saw the additional aspect of enlarging one's territory through such prayers, with a clear potential for increased prosperity.¹⁴¹ The general impact is that this prayer would have the effect of making the believer to be a person more significant for the purposes of God as well as personally more prosperous.

Comments on Their Interpretation – The author's intent would apparently be to highlight a person of interest from the genealogies of the Jewish nation, as one who remarkably and unusually asked for things in prayer. The writer of 1 Chronicles would therefore, reasonably, be presenting Jabez as a role model to follow. The non-Word-faith prosperity teachers do not comprehensively draw attention to all aspects of this verse, confining their consideration to the prayer for increased blessing with one also considering the concept of enlarged territory, presumably as a means of achieving this desired blessing. Consequently, the significance of this verse for contemporary believers is not fully explored, since little or no reference is made to other potential teaching points based on God's hand being with the individual and his protection from the evil one. However, for this theme, the point is clearly made that it is appropriate and beneficial to ask for God's blessing.

The genre of this scripture is a very unusual one for a prosperity scripture of

¹³⁹ Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publications, 2000) 10.

¹⁴⁰ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 52.

¹⁴¹ Francis, *End Time Release*, 45.

application to contemporary believers, for 1 Chronicles is essentially a collection of factual data about historical Israelites, and indeed, this scripture is presented in much the same vein. It does not appear emotive or poetic in its approach. So, it would therefore be regarded as more appropriate for direct teaching and application to contemporary believers, so long as adjustment is made for its different place in redemption history.

As an OT scripture, however, it may need interpretation involving analogy or typology in applying its aspects, for even the nature of the blessing desired would be clarified by examples from its time. The appeal for blessing is reasonably obvious, however, with an understandable connection to financial blessing. However, when the verse moves on to ‘enlarged borders’ or ‘territory’ and the effect of ‘God’s hand being towards me’, there is a need for transition from OT to NT with an explanation of the application to believers today. Francis is the only one to explore these additional aspects, but her interpretation rather assumes their contemporary application, than logically exploring their meaning then and today. The applications arrived at apparently rely upon the Spirit’s illumination, together with pneumatological imagination in producing appropriate significance for believers today. However, evidence for the grammatico-historical basis for such interpretations would be a welcome feature of the hermeneutical methodology.

Support by Commentators - The potential significance of this verse as a prosperity scripture has only emerged in the twentieth century with Wilkinson’s work as mentioned. Wilcock emphasizes the misfortune of a bad name, noting that Jabez’s name could be translated as *pain* or *misery*.¹⁴² Jabez apparently prayed for blessing and favour to meet his needs, changing the effect of his name. This theme resonates with the importance of the nature of one’s speech. As Wilcock summarizes, this incident reveals ‘that the threat of evil can be overcome by believing prayer and the power of a prayer answering God’.¹⁴³ Japhet perceived this to be an aetiological story showing cause and effect in this case, regarding the powerful effect of a name.¹⁴⁴ Klein suggests Jabez asked for divine blessing as an extension of his territory and, thereby, increasing his influence.¹⁴⁵ Secondly, he requests God’s hand to assist and

¹⁴² Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Chronicles* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987) 33.

¹⁴³ Wilcock, *Message of Chronicles*, 33.

¹⁴⁴ Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1993) 109.

¹⁴⁵ Ralph W. Klein, *I Chronicles: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006) 132.

strengthen him, while thirdly, he asks to be delivered from the consequences of his name.¹⁴⁶ Thus in answering this prayer God gave Jabez honour and obvious prosperity.¹⁴⁷

Conclusion – The consensus here broadly supports the view that it is appropriate to ask God for material benefits. But the commentators go beyond this to emphasize how such prayers counteract the effect of a bad name. Therefore praying for oneself should not be regarded as self-centred as it would reverse the devil’s plans for the believer. Therefore, the reasonable inference may be drawn, that God does indeed intend to bless believers especially if they ask specifically, as recommended by Spurgeon.¹⁴⁸

Proverbs 10:22

As Interpreted by Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – This verse refers to the ‘blessing of God’ as in 1 Chronicles 4:10 and this blessing is in contrast, in Keesee’s mind, with the curse which fell upon the human race in Eden (Gen 3:14-21). So he takes this verse to mean that God wishes to break the curse affecting people, returning their experience of life to that of Eden before the fall.¹⁴⁹ Keesee takes the reference to ‘no sorrow’ to refer to ‘no labour’ or hard arduous work, because the curse has been broken in Christ and believers should participate in the new system of blessing which is not based on arduous labour.¹⁵⁰ This signifies that God’s financial blessings do not require pain or sweat. Francis also sees this verse opening the opportunity for increased wealth including real estate.¹⁵¹

Comments on Their Interpretation – The intent of the writer of Proverbs may be to encourage his readers to seek God’s blessing, including material and financial blessings, rather than to engage in self-effort or painful labour for his or her provision. The meaning transfers well enough to contemporary believers even though it is an obscure text from the midst of the book of Proverbs. As to genre, this text is clearly a wisdom text often quoted by prosperity teachers, having a fuller significance for them since it is made more accessible in Christ. Critics of prosperity teaching are sceptical about material blessings for NT and contemporary believers, but the transition from

¹⁴⁶ Klein, *I Chronicles*, 132.

¹⁴⁷ Klein, *I Chronicles*, 133.

¹⁴⁸ Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning*, 300.

¹⁴⁹ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 97.

¹⁵⁰ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 98.

¹⁵¹ Francis, *New Levels of Prosperity*, 34.

OT to NT and beyond does not appear to provide a convincing mechanism for its application as spiritual blessings only. It is probable that the Spirit's illumination applies a contemporary significance with a legitimate *deeper meaning*, that where believers are generous themselves they may expect such blessings. The Pentecostal community appears to have accepted the theme of 'the blessing' versus 'the curse' as themes that can be traced throughout Scripture.

Support by Commentators – Toy, writing in 1899, affirmed that physical wealth was the gift of God, but connected it directly to wisdom, so God's blessing may rest upon people's labours.¹⁵² The wealth of good men was said to be free from sorrow as distinct from the wealth of evil men.¹⁵³ So labour, of itself, was not useless but rather satisfying when accompanied by divine blessing.¹⁵⁴ Murphy, rather less encouragingly, rejects the absence of sorrow from the life of the believer,¹⁵⁵ but he 'affirms emphatically' that God works in the achievement of prosperity but not through human effort.¹⁵⁶ Waltke further adds that the Lord is the agent who brings wealth, but not to the sluggard.¹⁵⁷ He expresses instead that it is the use of wealth to serve others that causes wealth to be acquired.¹⁵⁸ He affirms that the latter part of the verse rules out hard arduous labour.¹⁵⁹

Conclusion – The interpretation of this scripture by the commentators suggests that God-given prosperity is assured to believers, although possibly not sorrow free. They accept that wealth may be regarded as a gift from God which may be received, according to some, by the application of *wisdom*. It is also suggested by some that this may involve the acquisition of wealth through what is termed 'blessed labour'. Furthermore, it appears that generous wealth distribution may also affect the extent to which further wealth may be received. These factors appear to be the controlling influence in wealth acquisition.

Also, this verse is further applied to the value of *wisdom*, leading to the likely

¹⁵² Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1959 [1899]) 212-3.

¹⁵³ Toy, *Book of Proverbs*, 213.

¹⁵⁴ Toy, *Book of Proverbs*, 213.

¹⁵⁵ Roland E. Murphy, *Word Bible Commentary: Proverbs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998) 75.

¹⁵⁶ Murphy, *Proverbs*, 75.

¹⁵⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1- 15* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 473.

¹⁵⁸ Waltke, *Proverbs 1 – 15*, 473.

¹⁵⁹ Waltke, *Proverbs 1 – 15*, 473.

interpretation that asking for blessing wisely ensures the absence of sorrow or regret associated with its provision. Also, since the way money is used is likely to affect one's further acquisition of God-given funds, it becomes important to include charitable donations in one's financial plans.

Prosperity Teaching Thus Substantiated – There is reasonable support for the belief that it is appropriate and beneficial to ask for blessings, which perhaps even believers today may overlook whilst seeking to solve their own problems independently. The reference to 'enlarged territory' is not well developed but there may be some value in the perception that the blessings received from God would cause the believer to be more significant and prosperous in his society. Jabez is therefore legitimately presented as a role model for believers today simply in terms of reasonably seeking blessings from God. Furthermore, both passages reasonably convey the belief that the blessings requested are for the overcoming of evil in the believer's life. 'The blessing' presented in Proverbs 10:22 is contrasted by prosperity teachers with 'the curse' affecting the human race as a result of Adam's sin. Since it is widely agreed that the blessing in Christ has broken the curse there would appear to be a logical application of this truth in the prosperity and physical well-being of believers.

Regarding the three category prosperity theology, theme 2 represents an appeal to *righteousness* in financial dealings, implying honesty and integrity as those released from the curse in Christ. Concerning the *wisdom* category, the broken curse means that believers should no longer be subject to arduous labour for minimal returns, but, instead, should expect and participate in fruitful, blessed work.

6.3.4 Theme 3 – A Renewed Mind

Introduction – With God as the source of the believer's provision and since praying for blessing is acceptable, the renewal of the mind becomes significant in order to ask wisely. This involves changing from secular human wisdom to trusting God's financial principles. Proverbs 23:7 is quoted to suggest that one's way of thinking actually equates with the way one is and suggests ways of transforming experience. This view is also supported by Romans 12:2 which indicates that believers must experience a transformed mind with its new ways of thinking.

Proverbs 23:7

As Interpreted by Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – As De Silva advises, a

prosperous soul is one having an image of self as successful and prosperous, for he submits that controlling one's behaviour has little impact compared to thinking well of oneself and allowing visions and dreams of success to surface.¹⁶⁰ His advice is that one focusses on the well-being of the inner person, changing the way one thinks of oneself so it is in line with what Scripture says. Thereby, he believes that inner wounds and destructive behaviour are removed. He further adds that the healthier heart thus produced will be one where dreams and desires will emerge spontaneously. He affirms the paradigm influencing our thoughts is actually forming and developing our reality, so a change from thinking of oneself as poor to regarding oneself as prosperous would be a wise move to make.¹⁶¹ Francis similarly advises that right thinking is necessary to achieve new levels of prosperity, for she advises that, since the devil knows what untapped potential for good there is in human beings, it will be his aim to promote and encourage a negative self-image in believers.¹⁶²

Comments on Their Interpretation – The prosperity teachers appear to have laid a very great deal on this one scripture, in developing the theme of personal self-image and its effects. The intention of the author of Proverbs was to offer a warning against receiving favours from one whose heart may be hostile towards you receiving the favour. The meaning intended is that the person's thoughts display his real attitude to the individual. Thus to transform the meaning to become that controlling one's thoughts will transform one's experience of life appears to be a manipulation of the scripture beyond its legitimate significance. Thus De Silva gives it the meaning that a new person can be created by changing one's thoughts seems not to be conveyed by this scripture.

Regarding genre, Proverbs is an example of wisdom literature containing a catalogue of individual pieces of advice for the application of wisdom to the individual. It is not therefore expected to be the source of general guiding themes which these authors have made it to be. However, there is some value in this interpretation for it seems to be supported by the interpretation of Romans 12:2 to follow in this sub-section. So the principle of speaking and thinking about oneself in keeping with Scripture may have value but it should be regarded with caution so far as this verse is concerned. The transition from its OT context to NT and contemporary believers is conducted in the

¹⁶⁰ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 24.

¹⁶¹ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 57, 66.

¹⁶² Francis, *New Levels of Prosperity*, 34.

prosperity teachers' usual superficial manner and its application to them is assumed rather than demonstrated. Also, typological or analogical explanations seem inappropriate to this scripture.

The application of this verse may well qualify as an example of *sensus plenior*, as the Spirit gives illumination. For this principle drawn out of an unlikely scripture may be an important principle for taking advantage of all the blessings of God's kingdom and may be a reasonable way to apply one's faith to be further blessed and to be a greater blessing to others. It would certainly be a matter for which the Christian community would need to authenticate its validity.

Support by the Commentators – Toy in his 1899 commentary stated that the person in question is not virtuous, but churlish and not worthy of emulation.¹⁶³ Murphy draws attention to the uncertainty of the translation of the early part of this verse which is the primary focus. Indeed, his translation reads '...like one who calculates in himself...',¹⁶⁴ suggesting that it is not words but the reflection in the heart which represents the true person.¹⁶⁵ Waltke offers a translation not too dissimilar to many English translations suggesting 'because as he calculates within himself so is he',¹⁶⁶ therefore supporting the notion that 'inner thinking reveals his true identity'.¹⁶⁷

Conclusion – There is broad agreement that the true person is the one of his or her inner thoughts. However, there is no suggestion among the commentators that transforming one's thinking will transform one's personality and one's effectiveness as a believer. Even so, it is possible that low self-worth will result in poor achievement and that transformation of a negative mind-set would significantly improve one's achievements, including financially, as proposed by De Silva. This, he claims is equivalent to renewing the mind as in Romans 12:2, which he refers to as a paradigm shift.¹⁶⁸

Romans 12:2

As Interpreted by Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – De Silva implies firstly, that one's faculty of thought needs to be renewed and secondly, one's behaviour will

¹⁶³ Toy, *Book of Proverbs*, 430.

¹⁶⁴ Murphy, *Proverbs*, 172-3.

¹⁶⁵ Murphy, *Proverbs*, 175.

¹⁶⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15-31* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005) 227, 242-3.

¹⁶⁷ Waltke, *Proverbs 15-31*, 242.

¹⁶⁸ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 24, 57, 66.

change accordingly.¹⁶⁹ He teaches a new way of thinking so that one's opinion of oneself is based on what Scripture declares, enabling one to dream and to envisage new achievable possibilities. Keesee adds that only through renewing the mind can one grasp the possibilities available in the kingdom of God.¹⁷⁰ He adds that learning a new way of thinking opens up new concepts for what the believer may achieve. Francis, likewise, holds the view that changing one's belief system will break the generational cycle of poverty, opening up new possibilities through faith.¹⁷¹ However, she acknowledges that it is hard to change the human mind, but a new belief and trust is achievable through it so that one may dare to dream.

Comments on Their Interpretation – Paul, the author of this scripture is appealing to his readers not to be conformed to this world, and that this requires a change in one's thinking. The author's intent is therefore right in line with the meaning and application of these prosperity teachers who apply the principles involved specifically to the area of finance. The unredeemed human mind cannot discern God's way of doing things and it takes the aligning of the mind with relevant scriptures to enable the renewing process to take place. So the meaning is the general renewing process but the significance comes in the form of the application of these principles to the Christian's finances.

The genre is a letter to NT believers and so it is of appropriate direct application to believers. Furthermore, the letter to the Romans was not written to address any specific error or problem in the church and so that reduces the need for a consideration of the historical context. The Spirit's illumination on this text takes the form of Spirit-inspired significance, to the area of Christian prosperity. It is important to note that the renewal of the believer's thinking regarding money is placed in the context of being a living sacrifice (v. 1) and so there is an implicit declaration that such funds are not primarily or exclusively for self, but in order to be a greater blessing to believers in general.

Support by Commentators - Barth commented that, in seeking God, one is pursuing the good, well-pleasing and perfect thing which God plans for the believer by the grace of God (v. 3).¹⁷² Moreover, clearly discerning God's plan for one's life can only

¹⁶⁹ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 25.

¹⁷⁰ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 114.

¹⁷¹ Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 103-4.

¹⁷² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, 497.

come through renewing of the mind.¹⁷³ This, he affirmed, requires a break from tradition and routine causing the kingdom of God to become apparent to others.¹⁷⁴ He advised that the ‘voice of the Good Shepherd is not in the form of a law’ but may lead one in ways in conflict with views of one’s community.¹⁷⁵

Dunn suggests that the renewal of the mind involves the idea of metamorphosis; a concept not uncommon in Jewish writings.¹⁷⁶ Importantly, he regards this as a transformation, and not essentially a conversion experience. The language suggests that the transformation is solely God’s work, albeit with human cooperation,¹⁷⁷ the renewal being inward including the ‘person’s power of thought and reason’.¹⁷⁸ This enables the will of God to be discerned, made easier because one learns to think to a greater degree like God. Dunn believes this was Paul’s basis for responsible living.¹⁷⁹ Moo advises that renewing the mind is not automatic when one believes, but depends upon what the mind dwells upon.¹⁸⁰ He notices Paul’s teaching that believers were not under the law and so renewing the mind releases one from it.¹⁸¹ On the contrary, it involves the Spirit’s work ‘changing the way we think from within’.¹⁸² Stott sees the renewing process involving a combination of the Spirit and the word of God.¹⁸³

Conclusion – The comments on Romans 12:2 represent a call to change one’s thinking from the world’s ways, to a new set of standards, expectations and values. There is a consensus among commentators for this as an on-going experience for believers, replacing worldly ways of thinking with a pattern consistent with God’s ways and not by application of law. It may also be true that, where believers have been subjected to legalistic religious traditions, renewing the mind might well have a transforming effect on traditional trust in the value of poverty.

Prosperity Teaching Thus Substantiated - Both verses quoted address the issue of a person’s mind-set and its impact on their success and well-being as believers. The Proverbs text gives some uncertain support for their teaching, uncertain, firstly,

¹⁷³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.2, 670.

¹⁷⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.2, 553.

¹⁷⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.2, 667.

¹⁷⁶ James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988) 713.

¹⁷⁷ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 713.

¹⁷⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 718.

¹⁷⁹ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 718.

¹⁸⁰ Moo, *Romans*, 398.

¹⁸¹ Moo, *Romans*, 399.

¹⁸² Moo, *Romans*, 400.

¹⁸³ Stott, *Romans*, 324.

because of its doubtful translation and secondly, because of its unpromising context, as one of a list of warnings, in this case against a selfish man of deceptive speech. This obscure text gives some support for their theme of the renewed mind, but for this topic it can only have tangential relevance, since it may be regarded as primarily a warning not to trust deceptive words. There is some support from this text that it is right to think well of oneself and from that perspective to expect God-given visions and dreams to emerge.

With Romans 12:2, non-Word-faith prosperity teachers are on much safer ground where Paul's advice can legitimately apply to contemporary believers. The importance of devotion to God and the need for transformation of one's thinking is apparent, with little transition from the context. This text also conveys that believers must initiate the process which God will facilitate so that the way one thinks is renewed. One's opinion of self should therefore be based on Scripture. Hirsch's meaning/significance distinction indicates diverse applications for the invariable core meaning, suggesting with this verse that renewing the mind could result in the transformation of one's financial plans and strategies.¹⁸⁴ In the process it is possible that the generational cycle of poverty may be broken as one's expectations are refocussed on Scripture.

Theme 3 provides significant support for the *wisdom* category of the three category prosperity theology. The renewing of the mind, an ongoing process, is seen to open up new levels of expectancy based on new ways of thinking financially. One effect of such *wisdom* is to think well of oneself with associated God-given dreams.

Furthermore, such *wisdom* determines that unsustainable loans are not part of God's financial principles. Renewing of the mind facilitates the perception of life from a new perspective, replacing the logic of self-preservation with a generosity established and enabled by God's provision.

6.3.5. Summary of Hermeneutical Evaluation

In the hermeneutical evaluation of the verses in theme 1, *God as the source of supply*, God is clearly seen as the source of believers' provision, where he responds to their devotion and righteousness. These verses suggest that it is firmly God's initiative and commentators make no mention of asking or receiving by faith. From theme 1, then, seeking God's kingdom would include issues of *righteousness* as in category 1 of the

¹⁸⁴ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1-13.

categorised prosperity classification involving honesty and integrity in financial dealings as well as tithing as a prerequisite to receiving the blessings God promises believers.

In theme 2, *asking for blessing*, the hermeneutical evaluation confirms that God-given prosperity is assured but may involve ‘blessed labour’. The way wealth is used will affect one’s further receipts from God, but it is appropriate to ask and beneficial to ask wisely. It is also not seen as selfish to ask for personal needs since it overcomes Satan’s plans to deprive believers. God invites believers to ask and to do so specifically. It is therefore appropriate and valuable to ask for blessings and the enlarged territory of 1 Chronicles 4:10 suggests that believers will be more significant and influential in society. Such blessings will enable the believer to overcome evil in his or her life.

As to the categorised prosperity classification, the non-Word-faith prosperity teachers add a new dimension in terms of *wisdom* in that it is prudent to seek God’s blessing rather than to engage in self-effort using secular or carnal methods. In particular, wisdom would not recommend resorting to loans as a solution to lack. With regard to category 3, the *faith* category, the act of asking God implies the exercise of faith, trusting in his provision.

In theme 3, *a renewed mind*, Proverbs 23:7 refers to how a person thinks as revealing the true person with its motivation. However, its hermeneutical evaluation only tangentially supports belief in changing the way one thinks as a means to transformed expectations in life. But this is the way non-Word-faith prosperity teachers have applied this text. However, the Romans text supports the concept of renewal by transformed thinking and therefore appears to be a legitimate teaching for believers. So, when one’s thinking is in keeping with the promised scriptural blessings of believers, it is concluded that one may succeed in changing the financial outcomes of life. Non-Word-faith prosperity teachers therefore add another aspect to category 2, the *wisdom* category of the categorised prosperity classification with the concept that, if one agrees with God’s word as to one’s blessing and prosperity as a believer, one’s experience may well follow such transformed thinking.

6.4. Concluding Remarks

The view of non-Word-faith prosperity teaching that God may be regarded as one’s source of supply appears to be a legitimate interpretation of the verses considered.

The hermeneutical evaluation of Matthew 6:33 supports this and adds the view that righteousness is a prerequisite for receiving this provision. However, the commentators make no mention of receiving by faith other than believing God for receiving righteousness (Rom 4:21-2) through faith. Although Philippians 4:19 is considered by commentators to offer clear evidence for God supplying one's needs, it implies only a passive role by the believer, for there is little perception among them that provision requires faith, nor is there any mention of making one's requests known to God.

However, non-Word-faith prosperity teaching that one *should* therefore ask for these blessings is generally upheld by the interpretation of 1 Chronicles 4:10 also suggesting the importance of a good opinion of self, with positive personal speech. An unpromising name or an unfortunate start in life may be a powerful negative influence not easily overcome, but an appeal to God for his blessing would appear to reverse such disappointing circumstances of life. Moreover, the value of specific requests is acknowledged by some commentators, noting Jabez's prayer for increased territory, for God's presence and for his protection from evil. Furthermore, although possibly perceived as self-centred, it is generally agreed to be acceptable, even advisable, to pray for one's own blessings, not least because it enables one to be a blessing (Gen 12:3). Indeed, perceivably, God expects to be asked and takes pleasure in responding positively.

Proverbs 10:22 promises that the blessing of the Lord makes rich without increasing sorrow. This verse is found in the context of applying *wisdom* by asking in line with the revealed will of God, ensuring the provision does not produce unforeseen disadvantages. The blessing may grant success in one's career, whereby work, but not burdensome labour, would be a means of the blessing. The blessing of the Lord was particularly associated with land in the OT, as the means of provision, but could also be a means of providing opportunity to bless others. However, this teaching is applied to new covenant believers in a different context, so land can legitimately refer to other less agrarian means of income which the Lord provides, to bless believers. Generosity with such blessing is important, for in Jewish thinking, money passed around increases wealth to all concerned.¹⁸⁵ This principle is also in keeping with the thinking of

¹⁸⁵ Daniel Lapin, *Thou Shalt Prosper: Ten Commandments for Making Money* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010) 293.

Spurgeon, that God will bless the generous Christian with more.¹⁸⁶

Right thinking is also necessary for developing prosperity. The interpretation of Proverbs 23:7 supports the notion that the real person is the hidden one of the thought-life so that renewing the mind is central to developing godly character. Contemporary commentators view Romans 12:2 as supporting the prosperity teaching of theme 3. They see a transformation over time through divine input, also requiring the believers' participation. Wisdom ensures that requests for blessing are prudent and in line with the perceived will of God. Such transformation will produce maturity ensuring a healthy element of generosity enabled by the receipt of God's material blessing. Whereas Word-faith prosperity teachers emphasize declaring positive pathways towards prosperity, non-Word-faith teachers emphasize renewing the mind so as to think in positive ways about one's prosperity.

As a result of the hermeneutical evaluation of non-Word-faith prosperity teaching, it is now possible to augment the three category prosperity theology developed in chapter 5 based on the hermeneutical evaluation of Word-faith prosperity teachers. With regard to category 1, the *righteousness* category, non-Word-faith teachers confirm that honesty and integrity in financial dealings are an essential requirement for receiving divine provision, as those released from the curse affecting unredeemed humanity. Also on this category, diligence in tithing is seen by some of them as positioning the believer for God's blessing. This then substantiates and augments the Word-faith position that this category also involves paying what one may owe, that one should not hoard funds for exclusively selfish purposes and that the love of money is a major error to avoid in this context.

Regarding category 2, the *wisdom* category, non-Word-faith prosperity teachers add to the Word-faith position of avoiding debt as far as one may with the strategy of creating a surplus from one's income for making charitable donations. Also, the non-Word-faith aspect of renewing the mind is a major additional aspect, where one is encouraged to think positively about oneself whilst developing a prosperity mentality enabling one to handle one's finances more effectively. This is declared to be on the basis that the curse has been broken in Christ and one should ensure that one is no longer subject to arduous labour with minimal returns. The renewed mind therefore should be expressed as a new expectancy, financially. They too also emphasize that

¹⁸⁶ Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning*, 300.

unsustainable loans would not be God's plan for the individual.

Category 3, the *faith* category, is a major aspect for Word-faith prosperity teaching with some legitimacy on the topics of faith and positive confession, miraculous debt cancellation as well as the hundredfold return and treasure in heaven said to be available now. An important feature drawn from Barth is that 'modest faith can do the impossible' encouraging those with such a deposit of faith to expect success in this area. To this theme non-Word-faith prosperity teachers emphasize certain aspects. Francis teaches that one should decide to exercise one's faith for wealth as those who are heirs of Abraham. Also another aspect of the *faith* category is that one should be generous as an expression of one's faith in God's provision.

Now, with the augmented three category prosperity theology in place, based on the hermeneutical evaluation of Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers, chapter 7 now follows in which the criticisms of those designated as critics and commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching will be evaluated hermeneutically. Then in chapter 8 the hermeneutical and theological issues raised will be finalised together with a concluding assessment of this thesis regarding two perceived financial systems and the three category prosperity theology.

Chapter 7 – Critics and Commentators of Word-Faith Prosperity Teaching

7.1. Introduction

The contributors to this debate were introduced in chapter 2 followed by the considered hermeneutical strategy for the thesis developed in chapter 3 to evaluate the interpretation of Scripture by all concerned. This strategy was then used to examine the interpretation of prosperity teachers, both Word-faith and non-Word-faith in chapters 4, 5 and 6. The present chapter now extends the hermeneutical evaluation to commentators and writers critical of Word-faith prosperity teaching. Those referred to as ‘critics’ are writers introduced in §2.6., who hold that prosperity is immoral and contrary to Scripture. This chapter also includes commentators of Word-faith doctrine, referred to as ‘scholarly context’, introduced in §§1.4. & 2.7, who specifically address Word-faith teaching in general and who offer an impartial view of its prosperity doctrine. Reference is also made to supporters or ‘sympathetic commentators’ who broadly support the Word-faith prosperity teaching (see §2.8.).

This chapter therefore extends the hermeneutical evaluation to representatives of these groups of writers to discover if, as Osborne puts it, they produce ‘an elucidation of a text’s present meaning, rather than its original intent.’¹ However, a study of the critics of Word-faith prosperity teaching reveals that with most of them there is very little systematic and direct interpretation of Scripture. Indeed, there is much less support from Scripture than a thorough hermeneutical analysis would seem to require. On the contrary, the critics appear to resort to another hermeneutic entirely based on the rejection of the perceived cultic roots of the forerunners of this movement, together with a condemnation of its perceived ‘cosmic teaching’ with a connection to the ‘metaphysical cults’. Added to this is the disparagement of the motives for which prosperity teachers pursue increased prosperity, suggesting a lack of sanctification with such teachers. Accordingly, the critics advocate achieving sufficiency with no surplus. This hermeneutical appraisal will therefore evaluate their use of Scripture and the legitimacy of their criticisms of prosperity teachers.

Also, as with chapter 6, the hermeneutics scholars whose views have been extensively expressed in chapters 3 – 5 will be taken as read for this chapter and only the hermeneutical issues of the author’s intent, the meaning/significance distinction, genre and historical context, the OT to NT transition and the illumination of the Spirit will

¹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 21.

be referred to as necessary. As Osborne teaches, the search for meaning and significance is first a science, then an art or a skill and finally a spiritual activity led by the Spirit. Accordingly, it is the aim of this chapter to discover the ‘science and art’ of their interpretation of Scripture to evaluate the legitimacy of the interpretation of critics and commentators.

7.2. The Views of the Critics and Commentators

7.2.1. Introduction

The development of doctrines and practices among progressive Christians of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has prompted a number of works from 1979 to 1995, critical of Word-faith prosperity teaching. New emphases began with the healing revival of the late nineteenth century, and with the Pentecostal movement of the early twentieth century leading to the charismatic renewal of the mid to late twentieth centuries and has finally given place to the Word-faith movement of the late twentieth century continuing until the present. Each new development has brought with it proposed biblical, if possibly biased, teaching with its associated re-examination of the hermeneutic strategies which have given rise to it. At every stage there have been those who steadfastly adhered to the traditional values, resisting any change on the basis of a different interpretation of Scripture, devotedly espoused by all sides in the debate. As this study examines the different criticisms of Word-faith prosperity, the aim will be to review and analyse the hermeneutical principles of all concerned. Kay appears to imply that Pentecostals have become tainted with consumerism with its glittering attractions.² He deplores that prosperity teaching has moved from alleviating poverty to become, since the 1980’s, a central preoccupation for believers, including the production of what he regards as ‘extravagant television programmes’ by prosperity preachers, who also need to make repeated appeals for funds to finance such a ministry.³ Thus, unworthy motives are considered in this chapter.

In pursuance of these objectives, this section will consider and analyse the concerns expressed by the ‘critics’. The aim will be to see the extent to which their criticisms are valid and how they are affected by the presuppositions they hold. A substantial group of writers has been consulted, ranging from critics to sympathetic supporters.

² Kay, *Pentecostalism*, 271.

³ William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 65.

Of this group, just five are reported in this chapter, of which two are critics of Word-faith prosperity teaching, Daniel McConnell and Hank Hanegraaff, whilst two are commentators on such prosperity teaching, forming part of the scholarly context referred to in §§1.4 & 2.6. These are Robert Bowman Jr. and Paul King, whilst the one sympathetic supporter of Word-faith prosperity teaching is William DeArteaga. Of those not specifically analysed here Perriman's work describes his hermeneutical strategy, which is quoted on occasion. Farah is an important critic, but his criticisms are mostly related to Word-faith healing, not covered by this thesis. Of the critics not studied in depth, the views of Fee, Hunt & McMahon, MacArthur and Barron are quoted on certain issues relating to the themes of the critics (see §7.3.).

7.2.2. - Critics

Daniel R. McConnell

Introduction – McConnell, a former student of Oral Roberts University and an advocate and participant in the Charismatic Renewal,⁴ based his book upon his master's thesis presented to that college in 1982, examining the perceived cultic origins of the Faith Movement and contains a section specifically addressing the prosperity doctrine of Word-faith teachers.⁵ In terms of a biblical analysis of the prosperity doctrine, McConnell acknowledges that there is biblical support that God will meet one's legitimate needs if one seeks him (Matt 6:8, 33).⁶ He affirms from 1 Timothy 6:8 that believers might reasonably expect the basic essentials for life, but he deplores the extravagant asking of Word-faith teachers, believing it to be lust.⁷ Perriman concurs saying that Matthew 6:33 sets the context revealing disciples sent out without bag or money.⁸ (See § 6.3.2. for an evaluation of Matthew 6:33).

Background to McConnell's Distrust of Word-Faith Prosperity Teaching – He alleges that the prosperity doctrine has questionable cultic and cultural influences. These relate to Kenyon, a forerunner of Word-faith teaching in general and his involvement in metaphysical cults, particularly New Thought, the first to suggest universal 'laws of prosperity'.⁹ This term was adopted by Hagin and Kenneth Copeland and became the

⁴ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, xx.

⁵ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, xv, 170-183.

⁶ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 176.

⁷ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 176.

⁸ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 177.

⁹ Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite*, 161-2; McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 182-3.

title of Copeland's first book on the subject.¹⁰ McConnell refers to this as *cosmic* teaching on prosperity where success and prosperity are granted by God to those who know the spiritual laws of the universe that govern financial prosperity.¹¹ He alleges that Copeland and others teach that God has set up these spiritual laws in creating the cosmos, providing believers with a success formula based on the belief that the spiritual world is stronger than the natural world.¹² But McConnell rejects the apparently impersonal nature of such spiritual laws in contrast to the provision by a sovereign God (presumably without asking).¹³ The concept of positive mental attitude and positive confession for obtaining riches suggests in his view a system based on psychic and occult powers, which have become a substitute for biblical faith.¹⁴

However, as DeArteaga points out, a doctrine cannot be rejected as cultic simply on the basis of the influences upon the teacher. He also reveals that McConnell was not aware of the positive influence upon Kenyon of the Faith-Cure movement. In any case DeArteaga regards McConnell's reasoning as a genetic fallacy; rejecting a doctrine because of its origins rather than by disproving the argument.¹⁵ What is apparent is that McConnell himself makes little appeal to Scripture in support of his criticisms and seems to make more of an appeal to accepted Christian norms.

McConnell strongly criticises Word-faith prosperity teaching as 'the pursuance of power, prestige and prosperity'.¹⁶ In likening the followers of this teaching to the church in Corinth to which Paul wrote his first epistle, he is criticising this teaching for being in stark contrast to submission to the claims of the cross (Gal 2:20). Those who seek for prosperity are accused of lust and worldly desires, which McConnell alleges need dealing with before seeking prosperity.¹⁷ This offers potential approval for seeking prosperity, but the impression given is that anyone in pursuit of financial prosperity is affected by the love of the world (1 John 2:15-17), for McConnell reminds his readers that one cannot serve God and Mammon (Matt 6:24). (See § 7.3.3. for further evaluation). This is surely a failure to understand that one who seeks God's financial prosperity need not be selfishly motivated, but may seek financial

¹⁰ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*.

¹¹ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 171.

¹² McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 172.

¹³ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 173.

¹⁴ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 174.

¹⁵ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 244-6.

¹⁶ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 177-8.

¹⁷ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 179.

blessings also for others, as with Abraham's covenant (Gen 12:1-3). So his conclusion is that 'the faith doctrine' is erroneous, failing to apply the cross.¹⁸ McConnell therefore implies that the crucified life is one of poverty and financially prosperous believers are unsanctified. The criticism therefore involves a superficial assessment of Word-faith prosperity teaching, disparaging the character of those who teach it and espouse this teaching.

McConnell also criticised the prosperity gospel because Paul could not be regarded as prosperous, and it is contrary to Paul's teaching and lifestyle.¹⁹ In response one would agree since he was described as hungry, thirsty and poorly clothed (1 Cor 4:11), but one must disagree as to Paul's teachings with several key passages on the believer's possible prosperity (Gal 3:13-14, 29; 2 Cor 8:9 & 9:6-12). The apparent inconsistency between Paul's practice and teaching is indeed of concern regarding the reliability of prosperity teaching. If it is a genuine expression of Christianity then it suggests that Paul wrote things in his letters, the implications of which he was unaware. If this is so then it has a significant bearing on the hermeneutics of interpreting Scripture with particular application to the area of author's intent. This would support the notion that the interpretation may go beyond the author's intent or experience, but should not be inconsistent with it.

Hermeneutical Evaluation of McConnell

Introduction – This evaluation attempts to discern and evaluate the hermeneutical strategies employed by McConnell in his critical assessment of Word-faith and other prosperity teaching. Ideally, this would involve his analysis of specific scriptures used in his criticism, but this has proved difficult because much of his work takes the form of a disparagement of such teaching on the basis of the associations of such teachers and of perceived accepted traditional views of accepted Christian attitudes and behaviour. In the absence of significant use of Scripture this evaluation has also been based on the hermeneutics of his statements and perceived traditional moral code.

Biblical Hermeneutics – Where McConnell seeks biblical support for his criticisms the author's intended meaning for the original recipients is carefully presented for the texts selected. For example, in quoting Matthew 6:33, he reasonably infers that

¹⁸ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 180.

¹⁹ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 177.

seeking God is a preliminary for receiving his provision.²⁰ He further interprets Matthew 6:8 to legitimately infer that God knows what we need, but will probably have taken the significance too far in saying that believers therefore do not need to ask. This would be a significance not in keeping with other scriptures. He also appears to be on less secure ground in saying that with food and clothing we ought to be content (1 Tim 6:8) for although a true statement from this verse his application of it is that believers should not be asking for more or seeking extravagance.²¹ In so doing, however, believers would miss the opportunity to seek God to be a greater blessing to others.

Regarding genre and historical context, the relatively few scriptures quoted by McConnell on the subject of prosperity are from the gospels and epistles whose genres require minimal adjustment for contemporary readers. Even so, the interpretation of Matthew 6:24 that one cannot serve God and mammon is taken by McConnell to mean that one cannot serve God and handle large sums of money, which the scripture does not appear to support.²² The issue is surely one's devotion to God and the adverse effect of the love of money upon it, to which prosperity teachers would reply that it is possible to acquire and use financial prosperity without participating in the love of money, although, admittedly, it would always be a danger to guard against. A similar rendering is made of 1 John 2:15-17, where McConnell unjustifiably, it appears, identifies seeking prosperity with lust, pride and a love of the world.²³ It is probable that McConnell is failing to distinguish between outward appearances such as having wealth and one's devotion to the Lord. There are no OT texts considered to indicate how McConnell would handle the transition from the OT to the NT and beyond, and furthermore there is no evidence of his taking advantage of the illumination of the Spirit in his criticisms

McConnell's Hermeneutics on Non-Biblical Issues – McConnell is particularly sensitive to the spiritual background of Word-faith prosperity teachers, noting Kenyon's interest in New Thought at one time in his life (see §1.6.2.). As a result all Word-faith teaching is labelled as cultic because of this connection.²⁴ So Kenyon's involvement with the metaphysical cults renders, in McConnell's view, all such

²⁰ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 176.

²¹ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 176.

²² McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 179.

²³ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 179.

²⁴ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 170-83.

teaching as cosmic teaching involving occult powers.²⁵ Moreover, McConnell perceives that any success of Word-faith teaching is because believers are taught to obey spiritual laws of the universe which God may or may not have put in place, in his view.²⁶

Another feature of McConnell's hermeneutics is to conclude that such beliefs render prosperity teaching to be impersonal by nature and not therefore based on any fellowship with God in its implementation.²⁷ The final feature of McConnell's hermeneutical approach to prosperity teaching is that he regards it as a manifestation of greed, overlooking the often repeated intention of prosperity teaching being to make believers a greater blessing to others. He seems determined to impugn the motives of Word-faith prosperity teaching, describing it as the 'pursuance of power, prestige and prosperity'.²⁸ He also refers to it as a manifestation of lust and worldly desires.²⁹ His conclusion is that it is a form of indulgence which fails to apply the cross, so that those who seek such prosperity must be unsanctified.³⁰

Pervading his interpretation of Word-faith prosperity teaching and the associated scriptures is a superficial directness which fails to address the correct motives and the reasonable justification for the actions of those pursuing prosperity, for in so doing they testify to attempting to become more effective servants of Christ, who desires their intended good works not to be impaired through lack of funds.

Conclusion – It appears that Word-faith prosperity teaching is foreign to McConnell's spiritual experience and beliefs, for he argues not from Scripture primarily but from the traditions of his religious background. He does not even consider the possibility of Word-faith prosperity teaching being consistent with Scripture. In identifying the pursuit of prosperity as lust, he does injustice to those who want to be a greater blessing to others and to the work of evangelism.

There is also little evidence of his own systematic hermeneutics, for scriptures are interpreted superficially, without regard for an appropriate significance in line with the author's intent. Also his choice of texts is no less selective than those he criticises.

Finally, as DeArteaga comments, his reasoning produces a genetic fallacy when

²⁵ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 174, 182-3.

²⁶ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 171.

²⁷ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 173.

²⁸ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 178.

²⁹ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 179.

³⁰ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 180.

rejecting a teaching without due regard for its consistency with Scripture's teaching. (See §7.3. for further analysis of his hermeneutical strategy). McConnell adds little to the three category prosperity theology except to express an appropriate passion for righteous dealings, however inappropriately expressed with regard to prosperity teaching.

Hank Hanegraaff (b. 1950)

Introduction – Hanegraaff was born in the Netherlands and was raised in the US in the Christian Reformed Church.³¹ He became a leading figure in the Christian counter-cult movement, becoming the director of the related Christian Research Institute in 1989.

Criticisms of Word-Faith Prosperity Teaching – His background predisposes him to be suspicious of any Christian teaching that breaks with established norms. He joins McConnell in criticising the cultic perceived roots to Word-faith prosperity teaching with its apparent reliance on cosmic spiritual laws. His words were harsh in criticising this teaching as 'blasphemous' and 'cultic', involving mystic activities as well as hypnosis and brainwashing.³² Such is his displeasure with Word-faith teaching that he alleges that if one accepted it as a valid form of Christianity, one would have to accept the Mormonism, the Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Science as well.³³ Similarly to McConnell, he believes one should beware of greed, and of the danger of riches as in Luke 16:19-31,³⁴ where he sees the rich man condemned simply for being rich, rather than for a wrong reliance upon wealth. (See § 7.3.5. for further discussion of this text). However, Perriman draws attention to the failure to show compassion as the reason for his condemnation.³⁵ Bowman regards this passage not as a generalisation but as showing that wealth is not a proof of righteousness.³⁶

Hanegraaff observes Word-faith belief that Jesus was not poor but rather prosperous as taught by Avanzini and others.³⁷ His response is that such teachers are distorting Scripture by teaching something allegedly rejected by the church in the previous two thousand years. However, it is also apparent from the gospels that Jesus never

³¹ Accessed from http://www.theopedia.com/Hank_Hanegraaff on 20.11.13.

³² Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 10-13, 37-43.

³³ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 46.

³⁴ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 185, 190.

³⁵ Perriman, *Faith & Prosperity*, 171.

³⁶ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 220.

³⁷ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 186-9

doubted that he would have sufficient funds for potentially large ministry expenses, demonstrating in the feeding of the five thousand and in his miracle at the marriage in Cana that substantial provision could be obtained miraculously when required (Matt 14:13-21; John 2:1-11).

Hanegraaff harshly criticises the giving of money in order to receive blessings, likening it to the purchasing of indulgences under the administration of Tetzl in the Middle Ages.³⁸ He also equates Roberts with Tetzl calling Roberts' character into question for such a practice.³⁹ There is also complete rejection of Word-faith teaching on the hundredfold return in Hanegraaff's writings. Gloria Copeland describes her simple belief that the hundredfold return is promised in scripture and that one can give \$10 and receive back \$1,000 (Mark 10:30).⁴⁰ Hanegraaff alleges that David Cerullo, John Avanzini and Jan Crouch have all promised their donors similar returns on their gifts, adding that it clearly is not happening or all believers would live in mansions.⁴¹ He and Fee also point to Mark 10:25 as a warning against the deceitfulness of riches, which teachers appear to be ignoring.⁴² (See §7.3.5. for further discussion of Luke 16:19-31). Perriman agrees that money can become an idol, taking the place of God.⁴³ McConnell believes that the teachers of the hundredfold return are influenced by the metaphysical cults who apparently taught prosperity almost exactly as Kenneth Copeland does.⁴⁴ This problem is said to be the result of impersonal knowledge and universal spiritual laws, rather than having a personal relationship with God.⁴⁵

Hanegraaff teaches the following guiding principles as a biblical approach to wealth. Firstly, we should regard ourselves as stewards of the earth's resources and secondly that accumulation of wealth is inappropriate and unbiblical.⁴⁶ He then adds that one should be content with his or her financial position in life (Phil 2:3-4; 4:12-13, 14, 17, 19).⁴⁷ Word-faith teachers would disagree, claiming that acquiring wealth makes believers more effective in serving Christ, while resisting the temptations associated with financial abundance. Hanegraaff asserts that wealth comes from the Lord, and

³⁸ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 193-5.

³⁹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 196-7

⁴⁰ Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity*, 71; Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 199.

⁴¹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 199-201.

⁴² Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 206; Fee, *Health and Wealth*, 38.

⁴³ Perriman, *Faith & Prosperity*, 240.

⁴⁴ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 172.

⁴⁵ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 172-3.

⁴⁶ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 226.

⁴⁷ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 227.

that one should not become attached to it, a position not at odds with prosperity teaching.⁴⁸

Hermeneutical Evaluation of Hanegraaff's Interpretation of Scripture

Introduction – His approach to hermeneutics is quite similar to that of McConnell, so here there will be a brief hermeneutical analysis and evaluation of his interpretation of Scripture, followed by an evaluation of his other hermeneutical concepts regarding his criticism of Word-faith prosperity teaching.

Biblical Interpretation – Firstly, he legitimately accesses the meaning of the writer of Luke 16:19-31, showing it to be a warning against greed.⁴⁹ However, he draws the implication that being rich is what caused the rich man's condemnation, but this appears to be a mistaken concept, for it must surely be how the rich man used his wealth that is the lesson being conveyed. So the meaning was correctly identified but the significance derived was probably erroneous. Also, the interpretation of the teaching associated with the 'rich young ruler' in Mark 10:25 is that, since riches hinder a person's salvation, one should not have riches.⁵⁰ But the significance for believers cannot be legitimately drawn from this verse since it does not apply to them. As to genre, most scriptures quoted by him are from the gospels and epistles, so they are of reasonably direct application to believers today. For example, when he quotes Philippians 2:3-4, the lesson is clearly not to be selfish, but to have due regard for the needs of others.⁵¹ This is a reasonable interpretation and not apparently at odds with Word-faith prosperity teaching. Furthermore he gives reasonable attention to the historical context of verses quoted, but concerning 3 John 2 he declares that its historical context rules out its general application.⁵²

There is little reference to OT scriptures so the issue of transition from OT to NT does not significantly arise. However, it is Hanegraaff's surprising view that Word-faith prosperity teachers tend to ignore the Spirit's illumination, causing them to mistakenly read meaning into Scripture, producing a substantially biased view of prosperity scriptures.⁵³ Both Hanegraaff and they therefore have a regard for the Spirit's illumination, but disagree as to its actual nature. All concerned would agree with

⁴⁸ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 228.

⁴⁹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 185, 190.

⁵⁰ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 226.

⁵¹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 227.

⁵² Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 223.

⁵³ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 221.

Hanegraaff that the Spirit's illumination gives insights that are spiritually discerned. However, he asserts that Word-faith teachers go beyond the text using it as an excuse to read their individual bias into the scriptures. This is the point of disagreement, and the legitimacy of practices thus described is not easy to discern, except that Yong proposes the role of the Christian community to arbitrate in such matters.⁵⁴ It is probable that Hanegraaff has drawn the boundary between permitted and unwarranted illumination too close by his perceived norms of Christianity.

Hermeneutical Issues on Hanegraaff's Criticism of Prosperity Teaching – He criticises Word-faith prosperity teaching because he perceives it to have cultic roots and to be reliant upon what he describes as cosmopolitan spiritual laws.⁵⁵ These criticisms regarding their prosperity teaching are based on a weak foundation, but his condemnation is nonetheless forthright in declaring Word-faith prosperity teaching to be on a par with Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witness teaching.⁵⁶ He rejects the hundredfold return because of the movement's perceived cultic origins,⁵⁷ also rejecting the belief that Jesus was wealthy and not poor as the prosperity teachers claim.⁵⁸ He therefore also rejects giving as a means to acquire prosperity.⁵⁹

He is also of the opinion that prosperity teaching is a cover for greed, which of course believers must rightly avoid.⁶⁰ He declares believers to be stewards and not accumulators of wealth, a position the prosperity teachers would not disagree with.⁶¹ Furthermore, he takes Scripture's injunction to be content with one's position in life (Phil 2:3-4) as a commandment not to acquire wealth for oneself. But if, as he suggests, believers are called to be stewards, then it could be reasonably concluded that the steward would be entrusted with substantial wealth to administer.⁶²

Thus, Hanegraaff's hermeneutical handling of Scripture and of prosperity teaching shows a superficiality resulting in unwarranted conclusions, both regarding Scripture's attitude to wealth and the motivation for acquiring prosperity among Word-faith prosperity adherents.

⁵⁴ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 275.

⁵⁵ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 10-13, 37-43.

⁵⁶ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 46.

⁵⁷ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 206.

⁵⁸ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 186-9.

⁵⁹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 193-5.

⁶⁰ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 185, 190.

⁶¹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 226.

⁶² Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 227-8.

Conclusion – Since Hanegraaff’s belief is that one’s financial standing is part of God’s sovereign choice, then attempts to improve one’s prosperity would be regarded as motivated by greed. The Word-faith position regards acquiring greater prosperity as enabling a worthy fulfilment of the calling upon one’s life. To say that giving and receiving are evil is to refute what appears to Word-faith teachers to be the clear teaching of Scripture (e.g. Luke 6:38), and regarding soliciting of gifts as equivalent to ‘buying indulgences’ would be an unwarranted accusation.

Hanegraaff’s rejection of universal spiritual laws as impersonal and not of God surely represents a misguided form of interpretation. Although it is certainly true that one’s theology should include belief in a personal immanent God, that would surely not be grounds for concluding that there are no guiding principles or spiritual laws governing the natural world and Christian spirituality. Hanegraaff offers no advice towards the three category prosperity theology. He recommends a close personal walk with God but disapproves of any attempt to improve one’s personal prosperity.

7.2.3. Scholarly Context

Introduction – The commentators of Word-faith doctrine, introduced in §§1.4. & 2.6. as the scholarly context for this thesis, published works mostly in the first decade of the 21st century, presenting a more dispassionate evaluation of Word-faith prosperity teaching and its critics. Of the scholarly works referred to, those of Bowman and King have been selected as being representative of these authors. Of the others, Kinnebrew’s study on positive confession dated 1988 is prior to the works of the critics, and Harrison’s work, though valuable, is largely the reporting of testimony. Also Perriman’s edited volume is referred to frequently in this thesis, whereas that of Atkinson, although valuable for background material has a different focus from this thesis. Bowman and King will both be consulted for their evaluation of prosperity teachers and their critics.

Robert M. Bowman, Jr. (b. 1953)

Introduction – Bowman has a BA from California State University and a Master’s degree in Biblical Studies and Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1981.⁶³ At the time of writing, he is Director of Research at the Institute for Religious

⁶³ Accessed from http://www.harpercollins.ca/authors/90000283/Robert_M_Bowman_Jr/index.aspx on 4th December 2013.

Research in Grand Rapids, Michigan.⁶⁴ He is also pursuing his doctoral studies with the South African Theological Seminary. Of particular interest to this thesis is the fact that Bowman was employed by the Christian Research Institute from 1984-91, but following Hanegraaff's appointment as president of the CRI there was a falling out between them and Bowman departed from this institution. However, Bowman's analysis and evaluation of Hanegraaff's teaching appears balanced and impartial. As Bowman himself testifies, it is his aim to 'deal calmly and honestly with the issues' whilst 'avoiding inflammatory and exaggerated statements about those with whom we disagree'.⁶⁵

His Teaching - Bowman observes the outlandish accusations of McConnell, Hunt & McMahon and Hanegraaff,⁶⁶ and suggests that it is easy to make Word-faith teachers look ridiculous by making a collection of their colourful statements.⁶⁷ Hanegraaff is perceived to be particularly prone to this tendency, but Bowman is clear that it misrepresents the way Word-faith people speak or teach in general. Although many critics have discerned Word-faith teaching to have its roots in the metaphysical cults or even to be occultist, Bowman disagrees, saying its roots are in classical Pentecostalism.⁶⁸ It could not be labelled cultic, he says, without labelling Pentecostalism as cultic also. The critics' opinion may be caused by Word-faith teachers' tendency to shock their audiences or readers with outrageous statements, but reading their content causes Bowman to acknowledge some truth in what they say.⁶⁹ He also believes that so-called 'words from God' which leaders of this movement, including Hagin, claim to have received, appear to make shocking claims and cause distrust among the critics, even though upon mature reflection these words may not be so controversial as they appear to be.⁷⁰

As mentioned, Bowman would distance himself from McConnell in labelling Word-faith teaching cultic on the basis of Kenyon's association with the metaphysical cults.⁷¹ Bowman is convinced that there is no basis for connecting Kenyon's doctrine

⁶⁴ Accessed from <http://www.irr.org/who-we-are> on 4th December 2013.

⁶⁵ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 13.

⁶⁶ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 18; McConnell, *Health and Wealth*, xviii; Hunt & McMahon, *Seduction of Christianity*, 88; Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 10.

⁶⁷ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 29-31.

⁶⁸ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 10-11.

⁶⁹ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 14-15.

⁷⁰ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 16-17.

⁷¹ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 53-55.

on prosperity with New Thought and goes to some length to show the differences between his teaching and those of that movement.

Bowman's observation from Word-faith teaching is that Jesus' relationship with the Spirit during his earthly ministry is a model for each believer's relationship with the Spirit too. He notes that Word-faith theology considers believers to be 'divine spirits created and redeemed to rule our circumstances by speaking words of faith'.⁷² This is taught as the means for obtaining wealth, since Christ has redeemed believers from the curse of the law, so they are expected to rule over and change their circumstances through words spoken in faith. Bowman's approach is to focus on 'biblical teachings that are relevant to evaluating of Word-faith theology'.

Bowman quotes Kenneth Copeland's teaching that poverty is a curse, based on Deuteronomy 28, and that in Christ we have freedom from the curse. Copeland concludes that God intends his people to be wealthy (Ps 103:2-3, Mark 10:29-30, 3 John 2).⁷³ Bowman acknowledges Galatians 3:13 as appearing to confirm that the curse has indeed been removed, but concludes that the blessing of Abraham (v. 14) would not include financial prosperity since the chapter identifies the blessing as the righteousness which is by faith (v15-16).⁷⁴ However, it appears unlikely that one may receive the blessing of righteousness without participating in the material benefit it produces. Bowman's underlying principle is apparently that OT blessings are material, whilst in the NT they are exclusively spiritual, a distinction which is unsubstantiated.

Another reason Bowman quotes to doubt the application of the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 to contemporary believers is because the blessings are promised to the nation of Israel (vs. 1, 7, 9).⁷⁵ Although this can be seen in some verses, in other verses the individual dimension is clearly seen, in that reference is made to one's basket and kneading bowl (v. 5) and to barns (v. 8). It might be asked how national blessings might be imparted without a manifestation in terms of personal and individual blessings. (See §7.3.2. for further discussion of this passage).

Bowman comes to the final conclusion that the Word-faith movement is 'suborthodox and aberrant', that some of its teachers are teaching heresy, and that many if not most

⁷² Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 33.

⁷³ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 206-8.

⁷⁴ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 208-9.

⁷⁵ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 209.

of its followers are orthodox in their belief, even though theologically uninformed.⁷⁶ However, he could not go so far as to call the movement cultic, for perceived individual heresy does not make the movement cultic.⁷⁷

Evaluation of Bowman's Hermeneutics – His hermeneutical strategy is not explicitly described and with regard to prosperity teaching the number of scriptures quoted is quite limited. This evaluation seeks to extract his hermeneutics from the brief references he makes to specific scriptures. Bowman is careful with the author's intent. For example with Deuteronomy 28 he questions the Word-faith interpretation that these blessings apply to contemporary believers,⁷⁸ for the passage refers to material blessings for physical Israel and considers these do not therefore apply to believers today. As to the meaning/significance distinction, Bowman appears to be restricted in his use of this, and is reluctant to consider any significance of this passage to new covenant believers. Furthermore, the NT reference to the curse being broken in Christ (Gal 3:13-14) is not perceived to support such application and he believes with little supporting evidence that the broken curse does not include deliverance from poverty.⁷⁹

Bowman is also attentive to the genre of the scriptures quoted, when taking Deuteronomy 28 to refer to national blessings only. The transition from OT to NT is made in the belief that blessings in the OT are material, whereas in the NT they are spiritual only.⁸⁰ Such perceptions clearly limit the significance of the scriptures quoted and may actually prevent the receipt of personal and material blessings for contemporary believers on the basis of too strict an interpretation. As to the illumination of the Spirit, Bowman claims to approve acceptable Pentecostal practices and beliefs, but appears somewhat regimented and restricted in his acceptance of what may be legitimate illumination from the Spirit. Furthermore, in general, he advocates a spirituality in which unspecified spiritual blessings are received whilst material and financial restrictions upon the believer remain unaddressed. However, Word-faith advocates suggest not a 'get rich quick' teaching but a positive message of hope for the poor believer, which Bowman's position may deny.

⁷⁶ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 227-8.

⁷⁷ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 228.

⁷⁸ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 206-7.

⁷⁹ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 206, 208.

⁸⁰ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 208-9.

Conclusion – Bowman is not explicit about hermeneutical strategy adopted, but unlike many of the critics, he is careful to place Word-faith roots firmly within classical Pentecostalism. He finds no basis for associating Word-faith doctrine with New Thought teaching. However, like most moderates in this field he does take exception to the hundredfold return and to positive confession which he regards as unbiblical. He acknowledges 3 John 2, but warns that it offers no guarantee of prosperity. He also acknowledges that, although the curse is broken (Gen 3, Gal 3:13), he sees no prospect of resulting material blessing, for he does not see the broken curse replaced by an equivalent blessing. This represents a balanced view on prosperity teaching but in achieving balance he may have disregarded the distinctive aspects of the prosperity message, primarily those involving a miraculous element. Since, for Bowman, the blessings for contemporary believers do not include material blessings, he sees no guarantee of prosperity for believers and therefore adds nothing to the three category prosperity theology.

Paul L. King (d.o.b. not known)

Introduction – When he published his scholarly work on a related subject, King was Associate Professor at Oral Roberts University, where he remained until 2012. Now he is President of Paul King Ministries, having previously qualified with a DMin from ORU in 2000, and with a DTh from the University of South Africa in 2002. In his study he compared contemporary Word-faith theologies with what he describes as ‘classic faith’ teaching on prosperity, referring to faith teachers and workers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was to demonstrate that the origins of much Word-faith teaching were not the metaphysical cults but rather these classic faith teachers, and the justification for their acceptance was that virtually all had ‘a scholarly theological education’. ⁸¹ In King’s estimation, the faith doctrines of the classic group are trustworthy, whereas the teaching of contemporary Word-faith teachers, having no such scholarly background, is regarded as suspect where they diverge from or move beyond the teaching of their classic faith forerunners. So, as King acknowledges, as well as the need for contemporary faith teachers to develop some scholarly theological skills, those who rely too much on these skills would do well ‘to recognize that God does speak to his people today’ through special insight or

⁸¹ King, *Only Believe*, 347.

illumination.⁸² Therefore, much of the material which follows is based on the opinions of classic faith teachers on Christian prosperity.

His Teaching - It might also be added that King commends Hagin's last book for moderating a number of the perceived extreme doctrines of modern Word-faith teachers. Hagin's work is a study in balance and compromise, but the compromise is between the views of critics and perceived extremists in this field. Hagin's appeal is to logic, for example, but his compromise is not, as King observes, between expert scholarly interpretation and Spirit anointed revelation.⁸³

Contrary to the views of McConnell, Hanegraaff, Fee and MacArthur, King observes some forerunners of this movement believed that God wanted his people to be rich. Simpson quoted perceives no harm in money, if it is not valued for itself, whilst Cullis thought living by faith was a 'lost art'.⁸⁴ Smith commented that as a child in the heavenly Father's house, God would be grieved to see his child worry about provision.⁸⁵ The prosperity envisaged by the classic faith teachers did not involve 'conspicuous consumption' but a flow of wealth for the gospel as portrayed by the Higher Life writers.⁸⁶ So there was little reference to personal prosperity but more on finance for the work, including faith for daily provision as taught by Müller.⁸⁷ Taylor, whom King quotes, interpreted this in terms of learning how to live on less, a theme also taken up at a higher level by non-Word-faith teacher De Silva, who described keeping expenditure in check when income improved with more set aside to support the work of the gospel (see §6.2.8.).⁸⁸

Opposed by Hanegraaff, King endorses a generous giving attitude, involving tithing and offerings, both exercised in faith.⁸⁹ King observes that, contrary to MacArthur and Hanegraaff, Word-faith prosperity teachers did not invent the concept of seed-faith, because Roberts as a forerunner wrote about it, and King quotes this principle as taught by Murray in the late nineteenth century and by Nee, more recently.⁹⁰

Spurgeon, also a nineteenth century author, promoted the concept of seed-faith. He

⁸² King, *Only Believe*, 342-3.

⁸³ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 146-50; King, *Only Believe*, 340.

⁸⁴ King, *Only Believe*, 323.

⁸⁵ King, *Only Believe*, 323.

⁸⁶ King, *Only Believe*, 323.

⁸⁷ King, *Only Believe*, 324.

⁸⁸ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 52.

⁸⁹ King, *Only Believe*, 328.

⁹⁰ Murray, *School of Prayer*, 80; King, *Only Believe*, 329; Angus Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1973) 87.

taught that faith's way of gaining is giving and that the liberal giver can expect to rise to new levels of wealth.⁹¹

King notes the cautionary comments of 'classic faith' teachers, about the dangers that prosperity brings.⁹² Quoting Wigglesworth he advises giving one's desires to God, assured that he will bring them to us. Carmichael whom he also quotes says that God gives better than our natural desires, and that prosperity should be for the sake of others, although blessings may come in the process. Therefore it is primarily for others, with the occasional luxuries which Spurgeon and she allow (see §§2.2.3 & 5. on the pioneers).⁹³ Moody is quoted adding that one can handle affliction more easily than prosperity. Simpson is also quoted observing how few knew how to abound. The guiding principle put forward by Chambers is best expressed in Matthew 6:33 suggesting that seeking God's kingdom is to be one's preoccupation, rather than seeking prosperity.⁹⁴ As Simpson says, whom King quotes, the goal is God, not blessing, whilst Moody whom he also quotes, taught on avoiding preoccupation with this world.⁹⁵

According to King, for 'classic faith' teachers, avoiding debt was an important principle.⁹⁶ For Müller, debt was regarded as unscriptural (Rom 13:8), advising that it was better to be in need than to be in debt. Therefore, the advice was to know what one had and not to overextend oneself in giving or in any other area.⁹⁷ King observed that many other faith teachers from that era agreed with these principles including Taylor, Spurgeon, Carmichael, Simpson and Studd.⁹⁸ As King mentions, contemporary Word-faith prosperity teachers advise those in debt, regardless of the reason, to expect help in miraculous debt cancellation (see §§4.2.6. & 5.2.4.).

King endorses the following principles adopted by classic faith prosperity teachers. These are a giving attitude, the avoidance of debt, trusting God by taking one's needs to him, and praying and believing for abundance.⁹⁹ This involves making specific requests and believing for specific answers, for King suggests Müller might declare,

⁹¹ Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning*, 300; King, *Only Believe*, 329.

⁹² King, *Only Believe*, 327.

⁹³ King, *Only Believe*, 327.

⁹⁴ King, *Only Believe*, 328; Oswald Chambers *Daily Thoughts for Disciples* (Grand rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1994 [1876]) Nov 7.

⁹⁵ King, *Only Believe*, 328.

⁹⁶ King, *Only Believe*, 329.

⁹⁷ Müller, *Autobiography*, 43, 162; King, *Only Believe*, 329.

⁹⁸ King, *Only Believe*, 329.

⁹⁹ King, *Only Believe*, 330.

paraphrasing James 4:1, ‘You have not *exactly* what you need because you asked not for *exactly* what you needed.’¹⁰⁰ This type of prayer proved successful in the work of his ministry.

Hermeneutical Evaluation of King’s Teaching

Introduction – When evaluating the interpretation of those involved in the prosperity debate it would normally be expected to do so on the basis of the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3. However, in the case of King this is not possible for his evaluation of prosperity teaching is made on a different basis. He quotes just three scriptures on this subject (3 John 2, Luke 6:38 and Mark 11:22-24) and makes no attempt to comment on their interpretation directly, simply acknowledging that these are central scriptures used by Word-faith prosperity teachers. He notes that there were faith teachers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, referred to as ‘classic faith teachers’ who had received a scholarly education.¹⁰¹ Therefore, as mentioned, he evaluates contemporary faith teaching on the basis of its agreement with classic faith teaching.¹⁰² There is therefore no direct interpretation of Scripture to evaluate.

Evaluation - On this basis he sees that ‘classic faith’ teachers believed God wanted his people wealthy and this finance was primarily for their ministries.¹⁰³ King also endorsed the principle of generous giving, also noting that the concept of ‘seed-faith’ pre-dated Word-faith prosperity teaching as taught by Murray and Spurgeon.¹⁰⁴ King also approved of avoiding debt as Word-faith prosperity teachers also do, although belief in miraculous debt cancellation would be a step too far for him. Thus King gave partial approval to Word-faith prosperity teaching, supporting the principles of giving, the avoidance of debt, asking God specifically in prayer and believing for abundance¹⁰⁵

Conclusion – In keeping with his examination of the origins and development of Word-faith theologies, King’s follows his distinctive hermeneutical approach, evaluating the trustworthiness of the various contributors on the basis of their lack or otherwise of scholarly credentials. So, only where contemporary Word-faith prosperity teachers agree with classic faith prosperity teachers does he have the

¹⁰⁰ King, *Only Believe*, 331, (italics in the original text).

¹⁰¹ King, *Only Believe*, 347.

¹⁰² King, *Only Believe*, 342-3.

¹⁰³ King, *Only Believe*, 324.

¹⁰⁴ Murray, *School of Prayer*, 80; Spurgeon, *Faith’s Chequebook*, 5; King, *Only Believe*, 328-9.

¹⁰⁵ King, *Only Believe*, 328-30.

confidence to endorse their teaching. Evidently, the broad sweep of classic faith prosperity teaching meets with his approval, but contemporary expressions of it tend to be extreme and of dubious reliability in his opinion.

King's analysis of the essential core of prosperity teaching is taken from the highest common factors of 'classic faith' prosperity teaching summarised as working hard whilst trusting God for his provision. Such teachers commend a giving attitude whilst moderating expenditure to ensure there is a surplus for charitable donations. They also note the avoidance of debt whilst being satisfied with what one has. Finally, they recommend making specific requests whilst also praying for abundance. The above may be commended as wise and beneficial, but it does not accommodate a faith dimension as with Word-faith theology, and nor does it expect the miraculous intervention of God. In support of the categorised prosperity classification, King would support primarily the *wisdom* category, by recommending the avoidance of debt, the creation of a surplus for donations by moderating one's expenditure and by asking God for his specific provision. There is no implication for the *righteousness* aspect, or for the *faith* category, distrusting faith for the miraculous in this context.

7.2.4. Sympathetic Commentators

Introduction – Of the select group of supporters of Word-faith prosperity teaching and also of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement in general, just William DeArteaga's work is evaluated here, being perhaps the most scholarly of this group.

William DeArteaga

Introduction – At the time of publishing his book, DeArteaga was a resident of Smyrna, Georgia and the leader of St. Jude's Episcopal Church, Marietta.¹⁰⁶

DeArteaga's work is not specifically about prosperity teaching but a general examination of the spiritual forces opposing many features of the charismatic renewal, including Word-faith teaching. He identifies the greatest opposition to the move of the Spirit as coming from the church itself through what he calls 'pharisaism'. His work traces the impact of this mind-set through history to the present day, noting its opposition to the more miraculous manifestations of the ongoing spiritual renewal of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

¹⁰⁶ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 7, 13.

His Teaching - The criticism of the roots of Word-faith teaching by McConnell, Hanegraaf and others, causes DeArteaga to spend a chapter listing Kenyon's credentials, describing him as a pioneer theologian and true father of the contemporary Word-faith movement.¹⁰⁷ He decided that although Kenyon had dabbled in a range of different spiritual expressions, he was discerning in their appraisal and distanced himself from those that did not stand the test of his biblical evaluation.¹⁰⁸ As mentioned before, a detailed appraisal of Kenyon's ministry falls outside the remit of this thesis since he made little contribution to prosperity teaching. Suffice it to say that as an influential founding member of Word-faith theology, DeArteaga views Kenyon's teaching as biblically based and 'divested of Gnostic elements'.¹⁰⁹

DeArteaga also considered spiritual laws, strongly opposed by McConnell, Hanegraaff and MacArthur, as 'biblical principles governing the interaction between human ethical acts and their consequences, especially in this world'.¹¹⁰ However, because spiritual laws were adopted by a Western spiritualist cult, they were regarded as a heresy. But DeArteaga argued that despite this unpromising association the concept of spiritual laws could also be a valid teaching so long as it was understood as a scriptural way of ordering one's life.¹¹¹

De Arteaga traces what he perceives to be the destructive work of 'Victorian Pharisees', describing their anti-charismatic, Spirit-opposing approach.¹¹² The cessationist dogma he describes proclaimed belief in the God of heaven but denied any miracles in the believers' life. DeArteaga conducts a surprising study into the application of the scientific principle of the quantum theory and its application to spiritual influences on the material world. He draws the conclusion that what pharisaical believers regard as doubtful practices, appear more coherent in the light of this theory, and this begins to provide support for some of the contested Word-faith practices such as visualisation and positive confession.¹¹³ Therefore the practice of visualisation, much taught by Word-faith teachers, was declared by DeArteaga to have a long and honourable history in Christianity, and should not be dismissed out of hand,

¹⁰⁷ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 212.

¹⁰⁸ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 212-222.

¹⁰⁹ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 223.

¹¹⁰ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 188.

¹¹¹ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 190.

¹¹² DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 128-34.

¹¹³ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 145-57.

for Brooks Alexander, whom he quotes, believes that the imagination is God-created and has its good and proper function.¹¹⁴

Turning to the implications for prosperity teaching, DeArteaga notes Paul's teaching on the value of honest labour, whilst the Catholic teaching promoted the monastic life in Christian attainment. The result was that the relationship between work and prosperity was lost for centuries and only through the Reformation did the principle of lay persons seeking their Christian purpose through honest work, was re-established.¹¹⁵ The result was several centuries of increased general prosperity in Europe, also carried to America with the Puritans and resulting in increased prosperity there also.

Evaluation of DeArteaga's Hermeneutics – His study represents a historical survey of attitudes to the work of the Holy Spirit, noting those who opposed this particularly with respect to Faith-Cure. Therefore he is more preoccupied with how others interpreted the scriptures referred to. Regarding the meaning/significance distinction he is concerned about both aspects, referring to this as sense knowledge as distinct from the additional aspect of the revelation of the Spirit. He is not dismissive of sense knowledge but regards the revelatory aspect as an essential aspect of interpretation, very much neglected, in his view, by the critics of Word-faith teachers. In this connection he quotes Kenyon's comment on 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 that problems arise when people reject revelation knowledge.¹¹⁶

Concerning genre, DeArteaga shows some indication of making allowance for this. When discussing the contested issue of 'spiritual laws' he quotes from Proverbs declaring that spiritual laws are exactly what that book comprises (e.g. Prov 10:4, 11:25).¹¹⁷ Spiritual laws are therefore legitimised as biblical principles showing the connection between man's ethics and their consequences. However, from the few OT scriptures quoted by DeArteaga there does not appear to be significant attention to the transition to the NT and beyond. For example, he quotes Malachi 3:10 in support of prosperity through hard work and obedience to the principle of tithing.¹¹⁸ However,

¹¹⁴ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 201, 210.

¹¹⁵ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 187.

¹¹⁶ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 218-9.

¹¹⁷ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 188, 190.

¹¹⁸ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 187.

like many prosperity teachers in general he appears to adopt the belief that a scripture may be applied equally simplistically from any part of the Bible.

As the title of his work suggests it is the role of the Spirit in interpretation that is of primary concern to him, as well as the suppression of the Spirit's ministry by those critical of such faith teaching. He therefore gives a lot of attention to the concept of quenching the Spirit and the advisability of cooperating with his ministry. The role of the Spirit in Spirit-inspired significance involves the application of Scripture to the individual. As mentioned, he quotes 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 referring to the things that are freely given to believers which can only be spiritually discerned.¹¹⁹ Therefore he relies heavily upon the Spirit's illumination believing that things may be revealed regarding the application of Scripture of which believers might otherwise remain unaware. This appears to be a reasonable conclusion from this scripture and he endorses Kenyon's view that the epistles are superior in their suitability for contemporary believers because, as mentioned in Ephesians 3:5, they contain fresh understanding of the 'mystery of Christ' revealed previously.

So his hermeneutics are probably somewhat biased towards refuting those critical of prosperity teaching and of Word-faith prosperity theology in particular. Inevitably, his hermeneutics emphasize the role of the Spirit and pass over issues more related to human scholarship. DeArteaga's perspective is nonetheless appropriate to an evaluation of the critics and those resistant to or negligent of the Spirit's ministry, but it could not be regarded as a fully rounded hermeneutical strategy.

Conclusion – DeArteaga represents the one voice raised in unequivocal support of Word-faith teaching in general. His emphasis is on working with the Spirit, with the miraculous dimension, that the cessationist critics deny. He respects the pioneering contribution of Kenyon, rejecting any suggestion of possible New Thought influence. Perhaps most significantly and uniquely, he finds a lucid justification for visualisation and positive confession in the quantum theory of the mid twentieth century. Also, his appreciation of the value of honest labour provides a useful balance to his teaching. It must be noted, however, that a systematic hermeneutical strategy for his interpretation of Scripture is not apparent.

7.2.5. Final Conclusion

¹¹⁹ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 218-9.

Many critics and commentators propose some form of hermeneutical theory, but it appears that none of them have demonstrated the use of such a strategy in forming their opinion on this matter. They broadly concur that pursuing wealth is immoral and causes the oppression of the poor, also suggesting that it is a denial of the sovereignty of God, an important tenet of many of the critics. Surprisingly, neither of the scholarly commentators offers any hermeneutical strategy for the interpretation of Scripture at all, concluding that there is no guarantee of financial prosperity or of any miraculous intervention in these matters. They simply advocate hard work and the formation of a surplus for making charitable donations, which, though beneficial, form only part of the possibilities which the scriptures studied present.

DeArteaga, among the sympathetic commentators accepts the miraculous with regard to financial prosperity and the work of the Spirit in this area. King's hermeneutical strategy, significantly, draws only on the interpretation of Scripture by 'classic faith teachers' who all have a scholarly background, but who also have had a substantial impact through their ministries. The interpretation of Scripture by 'classic faith teachers' is also accompanied by examples of their application of faith in these matters. DeArteaga, on the other hand, provides support from science's quantum theory for the apparently improbable Word-faith teaching of positive confession and visualisation. There is accordingly, an awareness of the possible influence of thoughts and spoken words over one's experience of physical reality, challenged unsystematically by the critics.

7.3. Hermeneutical Analysis of Themes from the Critics and Commentators

7.3.1. Introduction

From the views expressed in §7.2., the impression is gained that the critics disparaged the teaching of Word-faith prosperity teachers and their hermeneutical methodologies with little significant scriptural support, and without demonstrating the use of the scholarly hermeneutical principles they propose. The commentators of Word-faith teaching do, of course, refer to the scriptures supporting their prosperity teaching, but these have been analysed hermeneutically in chapter 5, so that will not be repeated here. Despite the scarcity of significant scriptural support for the contrary view, a select few texts are identified as the basis of their analysis of contra-prosperity teaching. The themes to be considered in this section are firstly, that the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 do not apply to contemporary believers, and secondly that pursuing

riches is undesirable, since one cannot serve God and wealth (Matt 6:24). The further issues are that of prosperity being equated with deification and self-exaltation (John 14:12), and the dangers of riches and greed (Luke 16:19-31).

The methodology for this section will take the form of an evaluation of the interpretation of critics and commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching on the scriptures used in support of their criticisms using the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3, together with possible support from a range of contemporary commentators on the scriptures consulted.

7.3.2. Theme 1 - Deuteronomy 28:1-13 Does Not Apply

Introduction – Although this passage suggests that prosperity is God’s reward for believers who carefully obey him, those opposed to this teaching reject this on the basis that this passage does not apply to NT or contemporary believers. But Word-faith prosperity teachers refer to this passage in support the view that poverty is a curse and that material prosperity is a blessing from God. Hagin taught that those who obey God receive material blessings (vs.1-13), and Roberts taught that those who obey will be influential and not insignificant, whilst also being a lender but not a borrower (vs.1, 12-13).¹²⁰ Kenneth Copeland teaches that this passage assures the believer of plentiful goods and that prosperity is a virtue.¹²¹

Fee and Bowman oppose this interpretation of Deuteronomy 28, for Fee asserts that possessions are only a reward for obedience in the OT.¹²² He asserts that the promised blessings of this passage no longer have application for NT or contemporary believers.¹²³ Bowman also teaches that the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 are not for Christians because they are national blessings and not directed to individual persons.¹²⁴ Perriman also denies the application of this passage to new covenant believers for it describes blessings given in obedience to the law.¹²⁵ In Atkinson’s considered analysis, there is no guarantee that promises from this passage are for Christians today, for it requires a careful transition from OT to NT. It is appropriate in

¹²⁰ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 7, 8, 12-14; Roberts, *Get Out of Debt Supernaturally*, 66-69.

¹²¹ Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 45.

¹²² Fee, *Health and Wealth*, 13.

¹²³ Fee, *Health and Wealth*, 12.

¹²⁴ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 209.

¹²⁵ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 158.

his view for Word-faith prosperity teachers to note its promises in order to expect God's liberal supply.¹²⁶

Comments on their Interpretation – As the hermeneutical scholars point out, the author's intention must be the starting point for interpretation with significance varying but not inconsistent with this intent. In the case of Deuteronomy 28 the author is giving advice in the form of a hypothetical imperative to OT believers as a direct challenge under the old covenant. The critics therefore see no relevance for NT and contemporary believers. However, as Atkinson points out, at least a general expectation of liberal blessing should be derived from this text. Furthermore, the author of Deuteronomy notes that blessings on national Israel do filter down to personal material blessings from which some contemporary significance ought to have been explored by the critics. The critics, then, perceive no significance from this passage for contemporary believers other than possible unspecified spiritual blessings as envisaged by Atkinson.

Regarding genre, this passage is part of the law for Israel, and the blessings promised are indeed in terms of obedience to the commandments given. This genre therefore requires its own principles of interpretation as the critics rightly suggest. The Word-faith prosperity teaching is typically derived from a contractual hermeneutic which applies this scripture like all scriptures in a contractual manner. However, the critics are probably too sweeping in their dismissal of this passage for current application. It seems that spiritual principles of blessing that follows obedience to God may be discerned from it, which the prosperity teachers should perhaps more cautiously apply. The transition from OT to NT and beyond is a matter which the critics attend to diligently, especially since, as McCartney and Clayton write, in some areas OT aspects cannot apply today.¹²⁷ However, it would appear that Deuteronomy 28 is not one of those passages where the principle of blessings both spiritual and material appear to have support from the NT (Eph 1:3, Luke 6:38). Thus the transition from OT to NT ought to allow for the equivalent blessings applicable to believers today, which the critics have made no attempt to address. As might be expected, the critics make little or no reference to the illumination of the Spirit, and thus could provide no Spirit-inspired significance as mention under the author's intent. Their interpretation then is

¹²⁶ Atkinson, 'God's Promises', 6.

¹²⁷ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 173.

lacking some of the principles of a scholarly interpretation, even as Word-faith prosperity teachers are criticized in other areas.

Support by Commentators - Barth sees Deuteronomy 28:10 applied to the whole world where blessing follows obedience to God.¹²⁸ There is an impression given by him that it is a broad principle applicable to any person. In a similar vein, Barth comments on verse 12 that although the blessings, like rain, are stored in heaven by God, they have to be actively received.¹²⁹ The implication, contrary to Perriman, is that these blessings, even here in Deuteronomy are also accessible through faith. So, as far as Barth is concerned the Deuteronomy passage is applicable to new covenant believers and may, perhaps, be the focus of their prayer with faith.

Writing a short time prior to 1895, Driver placed the passage in question firmly within the context of God's dealings with Israel as a result of observance of the Deuteronomic law.¹³⁰ In terms of genre it is believed to resemble a prophetic discourse.¹³¹ He also sets the blessings in the context of national life, such as victory against foes, prosperous seasons and respect from the world. He too does not make any comment about the apparent incongruity of national blessings referred to in terms of basket and kneading bowl.¹³² It is also interesting to note God's intention in blessing Israel was to give them an excess (v.11),¹³³ a concept not acceptable to certain of the critics.

Maxwell's 1987 commentary presents an encapsulated 'Deuteronomic theology' that 'those who follow the Lord may anticipate blessing in every area of their lives' whilst 'those who disobey the Lord may anticipate troubles in every area of their lives'.¹³⁴ However, Maxwell questions that the system of rewards and punishments can really be that simple, doubting that one's circumstances are always the result of one's character. Alternatively, prosperity may be the reward of faith, for Maxwell points out that a number of OT prophets do support the notion of those who honour the Lord

¹²⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV. 3.1*, 58.

¹²⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics III. 3*, 435.

¹³⁰ Samuel R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908 [1895]) 302.

¹³¹ Driver, *Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 303.

¹³² Driver, *Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 305.

¹³³ Driver, *Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 306.

¹³⁴ John C. Maxwell, *The Preacher's Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1987) 283.

having material prosperity (e.g. Psalm 1, 32:10, 37:25, Prov 2:12, Amos 4:6-11).¹³⁵

Wright advises that if curses happen they will be deserved, there is no such association between the blessings being earned as a reward.¹³⁶ It seems that he is making a point similar to Maxwell in that the blessings are already Israel's as part of the Abrahamic covenant and there is nothing they can do to earn or merit them.¹³⁷ However, it must be presumed that they can be cancelled or overcome by the curses which result from disobeying God's commands. Wright also perceives that this passage reveals something of the purpose of God's blessings, for verse 10 suggests that obedience will not only ensure the enjoyment of his blessings but will spread the knowledge of his name.¹³⁸ The end result that may be expected was that God would be able to bless all the peoples of the earth, which again makes a clear connection with God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:3).

Conclusion – The interpretation of this passage indicates a connection with the Abrahamic covenant. So, to present this as mere obedience to the law is to overlook an important aspect of this passage. And since the blessings are to be received as part of God's purposes to bless all the families of the earth, its new covenant application also seems inescapable. Moreover, it is also recognized that as Abraham received his blessings by faith, then it would be reasonable to suppose that receiving the blessings of Deuteronomy 28:1-13 by faith was also appropriate to contemporary believers.

The assertion that the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 do not apply to contemporary believers therefore appears unwarranted. In which case there is evidence to support categories 1 and 2 of the categorised prosperity theology. As to *righteousness*, Deuteronomy 28 promises blessings on the believers' work if they keep God's commands (v 8), and on the *wisdom* category there is support for the formation of a surplus (v 8) and for the avoidance of borrowing (v 12). These aspects arise from an alternative translation of this scripture.

Hermeneutically, then, this passage must be considered in the context of both OT and NT, allowing for an alternative interpretation for new covenant readers. Critics, probably, are affected by too strict an interpretation, so the hermeneutical strategy

¹³⁵ Maxwell, *Deuteronomy*, 284.

¹³⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *New International Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996) 280.

¹³⁷ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 280.

¹³⁸ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 281.

must allow for the possibility of NT themes to be found in this passage, especially with regard to Abraham. The human author's intent was clearly related to national Israel, but it is acceptable for it to have significance for individual contemporary believers. NT themes may legitimately be perceived in this OT text by virtue of the 'sensus plenior' with the illumination of the Spirit confirming such perceptions. Reference to Galatians 3:6-16 and 29, for example, would also give clear confirmation of the pertinence of applying OT themes, particularly those that have a clear connection with Abraham, to NT and contemporary believers.

7.3.3. Theme 2 - You Cannot Serve God and Mammon (Matt 6:24)

Introduction – Kenneth Copeland receives this verse as a warning against participating in contemporary secular financial practices, with their dangers and traps, including worry, which his approach will help to avoid.¹³⁹ Correspondingly, McConnell asserts that anyone pursuing financial prosperity is serving Mammon and not God.¹⁴⁰ However, Fee clarifies, warning believers not to trust in riches even if they do come. So his advice is that wealth is not evil in itself but the temptation to allow it to take God's place must be resisted.¹⁴¹

Comments on their Interpretation – This verse states that the believer cannot serve God and Mammon. It is not so much a moral statement as a declaration of what is impossible. The interpretation of the critics, however, appears to be that 'you cannot serve God and possess money'. But this appears to be a mis-interpretation of this verse which rather relates to whom one serves. Nonetheless, it is a sober warning to guard one's attitudes and aims regarding financial prosperity.

The author's intent is probably to make clear that a believer can have only one focus, so that a divided focus would be evil. McConnell, however, concludes from this verse that seeking financial prosperity is a denial of one's devotion to God.¹⁴² He does not consider the possibility that this verse might allow seeking God for greater prosperity, to be a greater blessing to fellow believers. Nor does he consider that the evil one may be involved in impeding one's receipt of financial blessings to limit one's effectiveness in fulfilling one's God-given purposes. Fee is closer to a balanced interpretation in seeing the author's intent in terms of not making riches one's

¹³⁹ Kenneth Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 349.

¹⁴⁰ McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 179-80.

¹⁴¹ Fee, *Health and Wealth*, 42.

¹⁴² McConnell, *Promise of Wealth*, 179-80.

security.¹⁴³ The critics, then, offer little in the way of the significance today for this verse.

There is little evidence of adjustment of meaning to allow for genre in the critics' interpretation. However, the text is a NT verse requiring only allowance for a slightly different place in redemption history. The critics claim a sufficiently robust grammatico-historical basis to their interpretation, but it is by no means as thorough as they suggest. So there is no discernible attention given to the illumination of the Spirit or to Spirit-inspired significance on their part.

Support by the Commentators - Barth advocates that the second master which one should not serve beside God is the sum of all material possessions.¹⁴⁴ Such possessions may not be a distraction of themselves but one must ensure one does not serve them. Barth therefore adds that in the service of Jesus Christ, one cannot serve another master whatever it may be, for he testifies that one can 'serve him either wholeheartedly or not at all'.¹⁴⁵

Morris deduces that one's service for God must be wholehearted, as with the slave who clearly can only do the bidding of one master.¹⁴⁶ He notes that money has the tendency to draw people away from God, so it would be a sin to serve money. However, he discerns that it is not impossible to be rich and to serve God.¹⁴⁷ Hagner also states that true service to God requires undivided commitment to just one master, ruling out the service of money.¹⁴⁸ In this context *Mammon* clearly means something more than just wealth, but suggests servitude to wealth overriding all other considerations.¹⁴⁹ He asserts that few can possess much in terms of this world's wealth without becoming enslaved to it. This represents a strong admonition against wealth in general, but the overriding consideration is where one's heart is focussed. There is no absolute requirement, however, for poverty, but a strong warning against money's powers of distraction.¹⁵⁰ Turner similarly suggests that disciples cannot divide their loyalties between heavenly and earthly values.¹⁵¹ The tacit assumption is

¹⁴³ Fee, *Health and Wealth*, 42.

¹⁴⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV*. 2, 169.

¹⁴⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV*. 3, 838.

¹⁴⁶ Morris, *Gospel of Matthew*, 155.

¹⁴⁷ Morris, *Gospel of Matthew*, 156.

¹⁴⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 159.

¹⁴⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 159-60.

¹⁵⁰ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 160.

¹⁵¹ Turner, *Matthew*, 197.

that money or wealth is earthly, but it must rather be how one deals with money that determines its spiritual value.

Conclusion – Although some commentators assert that money is only one of a number of possible temptations, the impression given is that it is very easy to be deceived by it so it becomes one's master and not one's servant. However, the hermeneutics used by the critics appear to produce a restricted interpretation, which is probably not its intended primary focus, as intended by the author. Therefore its significance should probably not include the avoidance of wealth, but rather a careful control of its influence upon the believer. The genre of the text is direct teaching, so there is little need for contextual adjustment. One cannot dismiss the warnings implicit in this verse, regarding the focus of one's devotion. However, it is not proven that those who seek to have more financial reserves for the work of the kingdom are somehow betraying their devotion to God, for there are innumerable 'good works' that would go undone without abundant financial supply.

As to the categorised prosperity classification, the interpretation of this scripture either with reference to the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 or by contemporary commentators is not seen to undermine any aspect of Word-faith prosperity teaching but rather with systematic hermeneutics supports an aspect of the *righteousness* category, presenting a valuable caution to be whole-hearted in one's service to God whilst guarding against any suggestion of serving wealth rather than God himself.

7.3.4. Theme 3 - Deification and Self-Exaltation (John 14:12)

Introduction – This verse appears to epitomise the teaching of Word-faith proponents suggesting that what Jesus did, he continues to do through his church, a belief held in common with the classic faith leaders, as King reports.¹⁵² Hanegraaff raises the issue of what he perceives to be the attempted deification of believers.¹⁵³ He rejects the Word-faith teaching that a human being can be equal with God, or that God desires to reproduce himself, as taught by Hagin and Kenneth Copeland whom he quotes. Hunt and McMahon regard this as deification and self-exaltation, quoting various philosophers but with no significant reference to Scripture.¹⁵⁴ McArthur regards the

¹⁵² King, *Only Believe*, 74.

¹⁵³ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 108.

¹⁵⁴ Hunt & McMahon, *Seduction of Christianity*, 55-57.

‘greater works’ as referring to great numbers being saved as on the day of Pentecost, suggesting that the age of miracles may be past.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, Perriman expresses concern over the promise of Jesus to grant whatever the disciples asked for and he questions the Word-faith prosperity teaching based on John 14:12 that Jesus’ disciples may expect to do whatever he did as well as greater things because he will go to the Father.¹⁵⁶

Comments on their Interpretation – The issue being discussed is whether believers today can expect to do what Jesus did during his earthly ministry and more also as taught by classic faith teachers quoted by King. The basis for interpretation as asserted by Hirsch was the author’s intent.¹⁵⁷ With John, the intent was clearly to report what Jesus did and taught, so if the meaning were not so challenging to contemporary believers, it would be taken to be a simple statement of Jesus’ intention for his disciples. However, Hunt and McMahon’s outright rejection of this straightforward meaning appears therefore unwarranted except, perhaps, in terms of a sense of human unworthiness and frailty.¹⁵⁸ The reference to ‘... because I go to the Father ...’ suggests a ministry inspired by the Holy Spirit, but MacArthur suggests that the ‘greater works’ are a reference to many being saved, based primarily, perhaps, on a lack of expectancy for miracles.¹⁵⁹ The critics give little or no consideration to further significance of this verse, since its surface meaning is very challenging to them and indeed to all.

The genre of this verse is in the form of a narrative, with its author as narrator. He was a close associate of Jesus giving a personal eyewitness account. Therefore the meaning should require little transformation as is expected with this genre type. However, Perriman doubts that Jesus’ disciples may expect to do whatever Christ did.¹⁶⁰ He therefore also doubts that the adoption of spiritual laws as well as speaking words of faith would be a legitimate fulfilment of this verse. His view is that prayer as believers gather together is the only possible fulfilment of this scripture. The illumination of the Spirit is not apparent in the critics’ interpretation. However, it is apparent that to label any believer who seeks to fulfil John 14:12 even to a moderate

¹⁵⁵ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 152-3.

¹⁵⁶ Perriman, *Faith & Prosperity*, 150.

¹⁵⁷ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 231-3.

¹⁵⁸ Hunt & McMahon, *Seduction of Christianity*, 55-7.

¹⁵⁹ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 152-3.

¹⁶⁰ Perriman, *Faith and Prosperity*, 150.

degree as deifying or exalting themselves would be an unwarranted accusation.

Support by Commentators – According to Barth, John 14:12 supports the view that the believer's faith not only redeems him from his needs, but also does the same for others, for God's sovereignty is not the least bit diminished by their exercise of faith. On the contrary he assures us that it is to the greater glory of God.¹⁶¹ It would therefore surely be a mistake to suggest that the exercise of the believer's faith for greater and greater works should somehow be equated with deification and self-exaltation.

Morris, writing in 1995, identifies this verse as addressed to those with a personal commitment to Jesus.¹⁶² Such people will do the works that he does, and greater than these also. Morris explains this in terms of the coming of the Spirit, suggesting that Acts teaches that miracles are not the major fulfilment of this scripture, but rather the 'mighty works of conversion'.¹⁶³ It is confirmed in his mind by the ever increasing influence of the gospel message to widely scattered places as a worthy fulfilment of 'greater things'.

Burge notes the 'astonishing promise' of John 14:12 that remarkable works will occur after Jesus goes to be with the Father.¹⁶⁴ Burge, however, allows no diminishing of the impact of this verse, believing that any believer may participate in 'miraculous signs, when clearly for the glory of God in the name of Jesus'. However, Burge adds that this verse would also include deeds of service and love as well as miracles, through the Spirit.¹⁶⁵

Finally, Lincoln comments that Jesus' statement is to encourage believers to have faith for 'seemingly impossible things'.¹⁶⁶ He believes that the works are described as 'greater' because they reveal God's completed work through Jesus and extend the knowledge of God throughout the world. Therefore he says that just as the Father's works were done through the Son, so Jesus' works will be done through the

¹⁶¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV. 2, 241.

¹⁶² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995) 573.

¹⁶³ Morris, *John*, 574.

¹⁶⁴ Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000) 393-4.

¹⁶⁵ Burge, *John*, 394.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (New York, NY: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005) 392.

disciples.¹⁶⁷ It is belief in the miraculous through faith that must be seen as an essential element of Word-faith prosperity teaching.

Conclusion – There is no support for the belief that Word-faith leaders attempt to achieve deification or self-exaltation through the use of John 14:12. As the various commentators observe, the ‘greater works’ are to be achieved through cooperation with the Spirit, and there is little prospect of his assistance with such an unworthy motivation. Hermeneutically, there is need to allow alternative but consistent interpretations especially with respect to ‘greater works’. In terms of genre this text is part of Jesus’ final instructions to his followers and is therefore taken to have direct application to contemporary believers. One cannot conceive what hermeneutical strategy the critics may have adopted using this text as warning against deification and self-exaltation, but according to the commentators, it is reasonably intended as a stimulus to greater faith for greater influence and impact of the gospel.

Regarding the three category prosperity classification, contrary to the critics’ interpretation, this theme appears to offer support for category 3, the *faith* category, suggesting as it does a reliance upon the Spirit for faith for the miraculous in one’s financial arrangements, for whatever the challenge, Jesus demonstrated complete expectancy of the Father’s miraculous intervention when substantial provision was required, as for example in the feeding of the five thousand (Matt 14:13-21).

7.3.5. Theme 4 - The Dangers of Riches and Greed (Luke 16:19-31)

Introduction – Word-faith prosperity teaching holds that it is appropriate for believers to be financially prosperous, for their own blessing, as well as providing funds for the work of evangelism and assisting the poor. Some words of caution are provided, but apart from this there is no negative aspect to this teaching. The critics on the other hand believe that the dangers of financial prosperity are so great that it makes it too dangerous for believers to seek it. This passage is quoted in support of this theme, and will be examined hermeneutically for its likely interpretation.

This passage is understandably not referred to by Word-faith prosperity teachers, although its focus could conceivably be how not to handle wealth. The critics and commentators, however, draw attention to it as a suggested warning against pursuing wealth. Barron, another critic, suggests this passage shows approval for the poor man

¹⁶⁷ Lincoln, *Gospel of St John*, 392.

and not the rich man, in complete contrast to the prosperity message.¹⁶⁸ Hanegraaff says it demonstrates ‘the bankruptcy of the faith movement’s prosperity message’.¹⁶⁹ Bowman is cautious about generalisations, but affirms that wealth is no confirmation of spirituality.¹⁷⁰ Perriman discerns that it was not his wealth that is condemned, but the lack of compassion for the beggar.¹⁷¹ This account of the rich man and Lazarus suggests to critics that wealth will cause the believer to lose his place in heaven. However, the point must surely be, as Perriman suggests, how one uses one’s wealth, considering how different the outcome might have been had the rich man welcomed Lazarus in.

Comments on their Interpretation – This passage is presented by the critics as a warning against pursuing wealth. As to author’s intent, Luke’s purpose was to present an eyewitness account of the life and teachings of Jesus (Luke 1:1-3),. Specifically, the author’s intent was to present a teaching on God’s attitude to one’s use of wealth and riches. The critics give a superficial interpretation in which the author’s intent is apparently disregarded.¹⁷² The commentators of Word-faith teaching quoted, however, give a more discerning interpretation, where the author’s intent is more accurately expressed.¹⁷³ The significance they see is more appropriately how to use wealth once one has it. Generosity is perceived by Perriman as the succinct lesson of this ‘parable’.

As to genre, this passage appears to be used as a parable, yet the critics make little reference to the rules of interpretation for parables. There is, for example, no study of its structure nor reference to the main points as they relate to Jesus kingdom as recommended by Osborne.¹⁷⁴ As a result, then, they have not presented an accurate or balanced teaching on this passage. There is also little evidence of Spirit-inspired significance or of deeper meaning that Pinnock teaches.¹⁷⁵ Thus, the critics’ interpretation appears to be unreliable and unbalanced whereas the commentators of Word-faith teaching, Bowman and Perriman give a more balanced and nuanced

¹⁶⁸ Bruce Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel: What’s Going on Today in a Movement that has Shaped the Faith of Millions?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987) 98.

¹⁶⁹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 190.

¹⁷⁰ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 220.

¹⁷¹ Perriman, *Faith & Prosperity*, 171.

¹⁷² Barron, *Health and Wealth*, 98; Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 190.

¹⁷³ Bowman, *Word-Faith Controversy*, 220; Perriman, *Faith & Prosperity*, 171.

¹⁷⁴ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 304-7.

¹⁷⁵ Pinnock, ‘Spirit in Hermeneutics’, 3-4.

response.

Support by the Commentators – Barth made the point that all OT believers are ‘gathered in unto Abraham’ until Christ, and added that they believed beforehand, as Christians do, in the same promise having become the seed of Abraham.¹⁷⁶ Barth also identified that it is the poor, the weak, the meek and the lowly that God seeks and it is sinners to whom Jesus ministers.¹⁷⁷ Those who put their trust in wealth rather than in God will receive God’s punishment. This, then, adds a sober warning to believers not to allow deviation from devotion to God by such temptations.

Broadly speaking, these commentators make no connection with the appropriateness of acquiring wealth. Marshall noted the apparent sumptuous life-style of the rich man, who did nothing to help the beggar.¹⁷⁸ He also observed that only the rich man is in Hades which serves as a warning about having resources but not using them to alleviate the suffering of others.¹⁷⁹ Hendriksen too observed the extreme wealth of the rich man, noting that this represented an opportunity for the rich man to show pity.¹⁸⁰ He concluded that one should aim to assist one’s fellows and glorify God, to which the rich man did not give any attention.¹⁸¹ Green observes the wealth of the rich man in terms of clothing, food and dwelling, which reveal his love of money.¹⁸² His attitude was one of pride, a victim of his own choices.

Conclusion - This passage does not apparently teach that wealth is the route to condemnation and punishment, but rather that those acquiring financial prosperity should use it at least in part for charitable purposes. And this would support the concept of the graduated tithe as put forward by Sider.¹⁸³ The critics’ interpretation suggests that wealth endangers one’s eternal salvation, whereas Barth took it to suggest that trusting in wealth is what God punishes. This passage in the form of a parable is, however, not described as such by Jesus and the afterlife scene has an OT context, requiring interpreting for a NT setting. The author’s intent was to address the love of money, suggesting that it is permissible to seek wealth if one is willing to use it

¹⁷⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics I*, 2, 76.

¹⁷⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV*, 2, 169.

¹⁷⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978) 635-6.

¹⁷⁹ Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 637.

¹⁸⁰ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Luke* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978) 782-3.

¹⁸¹ Hendriksen, *Gospel of Luke*, 786.

¹⁸² Joel B. Green, *Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997) 605-6.

¹⁸³ Ron J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985 [1978]) 152-4.

for charity. This passage describes how the use of wealth reveals the nature of the individual's attitudes. Thus, money is regarded as an opportunity to do good, where one seeks to please God regardless of the outcome for one personally. This, then, represents another facet of the *righteousness* category of the categorised prosperity theology.

7.3.6. Conclusions on the Interpretation of Critics and Commentators

The evaluation of the interpretation of these scriptures suggests a superficial, imprecise application of these texts in opposing Word-faith prosperity teaching. It is possible that using Deuteronomy 28 in prosperity teaching requires transference from an OT scripture to a NT context. But Kenneth Copeland is convinced that OT and NT scriptures present a unified prosperity teaching. Furthermore, a connection with the Abrahamic covenant, suggests new covenant believers may legitimately receive prosperity by faith. There is undoubtedly a superficial use of Matthew 6:24 where critics suggest that the prosperity message is the pursuit of *Mammon* (implying wealth is a goal in itself), but the interpretation of this text suggests the issue is ensuring that money is one's servant and not one's master, and that having prosperity does not involve a loss of devotion to God. So this verse is valuable as a cautionary injunction about the deceitfulness of wealth but not as a justification for remaining poor. It is also unacceptable to regard the receiving of financial miracles as equivalent to deification or self-exaltation as suggested in connection with the use of John 14:12. The commentators imply that believers could achieve seemingly impossible things by the indwelling Spirit, including financial and material provision, as with Word-faith prosperity teaching.

Also, the critics claim that the dangers of increased prosperity are so great that seeking increased financial prosperity is strongly rejected. However, once again, the scriptures quoted purporting to support such a claim appear to have a different legitimate interpretation. For the interpretation of Mark 10:25 presents the teaching of wealth as an impediment to salvation for unbelievers, rather than an impediment to spiritual growth for the believer. Finally, the critics use Luke 16:19-31 to imply that wealth can cause individuals to forfeit their place in heaven, whereas its interpretation suggests that putting one's trust in wealth as a form of idolatry will imperil one's eternal salvation. So, it is not wealth that brings God's judgement, but rather failing to use at least some of it to alleviate suffering. The warning of this passage as with the

other texts is valuable, but it does not constitute a rebuke to those who by faith seek to improve their financial and material prosperity, for the work of Christian ministry.

7.4. Concluding Remarks

From their interpretation of Scripture, the critics have come to the conclusion that having wealth is immoral because it must, in their opinion, inevitably result in the oppression of the poor. Moreover, prosperity is rejected because it appears to them to undermine the sovereignty of God, for pursuing wealth involves human initiatives contrary to such a view. The commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching, however, do not regard it as wrong to seek financial prosperity, but their interpretation reveals no guarantee of receiving it. Nor do they offer any certainty of the miraculous in these affairs, simply advocating hard work and the development of a surplus for charitable use. And this marks the distinction, for sympathetic supporters uphold the expectation of miracles in this as in all aspects of life, together with the importance of staying in fellowship with God. Accordingly, there is reasonable support for acquiring prosperity by prudence and hard work, but little for the miraculous improvement of one's finances by faith.

It was intended that this chapter provide clear evidence of the hermeneutical strategies of critics and commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching, but this has been difficult to achieve. Surprisingly, it is the critics who have come closest to this, as each has come some way towards delineating their rationale for interpretation, but not with any significant degree of concurrence. Some strategies are sketchy and superficial, with few coming close to providing a comprehensive hermeneutical strategy. However, even where such a strategy is provided it is seldom that any evidence of its implementation is provided. Regarding the commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching, their strategies, though comprehensive do not appear to be based on conventional hermeneutical analysis, for, as mentioned, King bases his evaluation on the scholarly credentials of the classic faith teachers, even though their scholarly methods are never explained. Also Bowman does not seem to move beyond restating the generally agreed reformed position, again without enlightening his readers as to his hermeneutical strategies.

Regarding the interpretation of those texts which the critics use to oppose belief in Word-faith prosperity, analysis by commentators suggest that many of their criticisms are unwarranted, including their dismissal of OT scriptures without good reason. The

impression is given that they respond to any text on the misuse of money as a strong warning to avoid it altogether. Their arguments are thereby regarded as unwarranted and unsafe. Word-faith prosperity teaching is not thereby necessarily justified, but it could be argued that the general principle is supported, whilst the extreme aspects remain uncertain.

With regard to the three category prosperity classification, after a careful evaluation of the interpretation of the passages quoted by the critics in opposition to the Word-faith prosperity teaching, there appears to be little of the criticism which can be substantiated as a result of this evaluation. Indeed, a number of aspects of each prosperity category are supported as mentioned, whilst fresh insight emerges from theme 4 on Luke 16:19-31, suggesting that for category 1, *righteousness* also implies doing good when you have an opportunity and the facilities to do so.

Having now evaluated the interpretation of all parties to the debate, making use of the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3, this thesis moves to its final chapter, chapter 8, where the effectiveness of the hermeneutical methodology will be assessed together with the final analysis of the categorised prosperity theology derived in this thesis. These findings will also be compared with the theological assessment of prosperity teaching by two well regarded Pentecostal theologians.

Chapter 8: A Categorised Approach to Prosperity Teaching

8.1. Introduction

The aim of this concluding chapter is to summarise, analyse and evaluate the material presented thus far. It collates the evidence with its possible interpretation (see §8.2.), gathering the conclusions drawn from all chapters together with a review of the methods used to arrive at those conclusions. The extent to which both Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers and critics accurately and reliably interpret Scripture is evaluated for their conformity to the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this considered hermeneutical strategy is also assessed.

The conclusions of this research are compared with the findings of other Pentecostal theologians (see §8.3.), commenting on other unrelated and different research into the prosperity message. This is based on phenomenological research into manifestations of the prosperity gospel in various locations around the world, and examines prosperity teaching in general. None of the works of prosperity teachers are referred to in that research. However, it does offer a range of conclusions on the prosperity message in general for comparison. Next, this section goes on to analyse the degree of their consensus with prosperity teaching, presenting the final assessment of this research and proposing an overall strategy for valid prosperity teaching. Accordingly, a three category prosperity theology is generated based on the various aspects of the prosperity messages consulted, the major elements of which are supported by the hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3, also taken to be the hermeneutical strategy of the contemporary commentators. This chapter also forms an evaluation of the concept of two financial systems, assessing the scriptural warrant for these described as ‘God’s’ and ‘the world’s’ financial systems.

The final assessment of the thesis is presented (see §8.4.) with the proposed three category classification for making the prosperity message universally accessible so far as possible, offering the application of *righteousness*, *wisdom* and *faith* for financial blessings. This chapter closes with the final conclusions to this research.

8.2. Hermeneutical Issues

8.2.1. Introduction

In forming an evaluation of the first research question as to the strengths and weaknesses of the hermeneutics of prosperity teachers, different opinions have been

expressed. The starting point for analysis and evaluation of these opinions is to summarise the conclusions of each scholarly group, and in each case to identify some of the key issues raised.

8.2.2. Analysis of the Evidence

Word-faith Prosperity Teachers - Chapters 4 and 5 presented Word-faith prosperity teaching including a number of themes supported by scriptures. There are also applications of well-known scriptures which likewise appear not to have been considered previously by the church, although consistent with the author's general area of intent. As McCartney observes, 'We are dealing with the intention of the divine Author as well as that of the human author' which he says, will overlap with but not be identical to that of the human author.¹ Of the prosperity themes addressed in chapter 5, the following found a reasonable degree of acceptance through its interpretation in line with the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 and by the contemporary commentators, who reasonably adopted a hermeneutical methodology similar to that of chapter 3. Firstly, from theme 1, with regard to 3 John 2, sufficient scholars gave support to the view that it is appropriate for Christians to pursue wealth, especially when used for Christian ministry. In theme 2 the blessing of Abraham received general support from contemporary commentators, with Galatians 3:13-14, 29 offering NT support for viewing Abraham as a role model for receiving financial prosperity. The blessing of Abraham can be distinguished from 'the promise of the Spirit' (v.14), and Abraham's blessings were material and physical and therefore the blessing of Abraham for contemporary believers should reasonably be also.

From theme 3, borrowing and debt are acknowledged as a major problem both among Christians and non-Christians, and chapter 5 introduces various advocacies for avoiding debt in all areas of life. Debt is viewed as potentially immoral and an entrapment, representing poor financial management, unless for an appreciating asset. Kenneth Copeland quotes Romans 13:8 in support of a message to owe nothing (§§4.2.4. & 5.2.4.), whilst Roberts and Avanzini note Elisha's help for those in debt (2 Kings 4:1-7, §4.2.6.). Avanzini also quotes Deuteronomy 8:18 believing God-given wealth may be used appropriately to cancel debt. There is a strong message to end

¹ Dan McCartney, *Should We Employ the Hermeneutics of the New Testament Writers?* (paper presented to the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, 2003) 2, accessed from <http://www.bible-researcher.com/mccartney1.html> on 26th April 2014.

borrowing, since it may also represent a strategy of the evil one for limiting the usefulness of believers. This theme represents a prudent approach to finances, with which there would be little controversy. However, it overlaps with the faith category in terms of the pursuit of miraculous debt cancellation as propounded by Avanzini and Roberts, which nonetheless, finds little or no support from the commentators.

The remaining themes, 4 and 5, deal with more contentious territory of the miraculous in personal finance. It is at this transition from trust in divine benevolence to specific expectation for miraculous intervention in finances that the critics and a number of commentators reject the prosperity message. Theme 4 investigates the combination of faith and positive confession as a means of receiving. The first three themes were a matter of righteousness and wisdom, but the latter themes from Word-faith prosperity teaching require faith for their successful operation, if considered a legitimate interpretation of Scripture. In theme 5, the hundredfold return is acknowledged, but is not regarded by commentators as having specific financial application. Likewise, the promise of treasure in heaven is traditionally regarded as a reward for sacrifices made on earth to be received in heaven. So the suggestion that withdrawals can be made from this heavenly bank account, as supported by Kenneth Copeland and Savelle, find little or no support.

Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers - The themes are, firstly, that God may be regarded as the source of supply for believers, also generally supported by commentators, with the caveat that a righteous lifestyle is a prerequisite for this. The interpretation of Philippians 4:19 supports the belief that God responds to one's devotion, generosity and righteousness with divine provision. Faith for receiving wealth, however, is apparently not such a prominent consideration. The second theme is the appropriateness of asking for blessings. Non-Word-faith writers consider that praying for oneself is acceptable since it overcomes the devil's plans to rob the believer. So they recommend asking God for one's needs with specific requests. The third theme is the importance of seeking God for the renewal of the mind (Rom 12:2), enabling one to ask wisely. However, interpretation of the scriptures concerned gives no overt support for such a renewal transforming one's finances. However, there is possible legitimate application of this theme for changing from secular thinking. This renewing process is considered to be the work of the Spirit, with the application of God's word.

The Critics of Word-Faith Prosperity Teaching – These hostile opponents of Word-faith prosperity teaching with books published between 1985 and 1992 (see §7.2.2.) have concluded, from their interpretation of Scripture, that wealth is immoral, suggesting that prosperity must inevitably result in someone else's poverty. They also appear reluctant to support any doctrine which majors on human responsibility and underplays God's sovereignty. The neutral commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching with scholarly works published between 2001 and 2009 (see §§1.4., 2.6. & 7.2.3.), on the other hand, find no fault in seeking God for financial prosperity, but can offer no guarantee of receiving it.

Conclusion – Analysis of Word-faith prosperity teachers reveals a generally well-supported belief in prosperity as exemplified by the life of Abraham. It is for the believer to take the initiative in asking and giving, with expected divine intervention in receiving, with possible miraculous debt cancellation. Non-Word-faith prosperity teachers similarly trust in God as their source with the requirement to ask. They also teach the renewing of the mind for believers. The critics distance themselves from seeking prosperity because of their concern about making others poor and that having wealth is immoral. They also tend to avoid human initiatives, trusting in God's sovereignty.

8.2.3. Hermeneutical Methodology

Introduction -The position of all sides is that Scripture must be the final authority for all matters of faith and doctrine, yet widely divergent opinions as to its teaching are revealed. In this section the considered hermeneutic strategy for this thesis is reviewed, with its effectiveness in resolving the differences in opinion over this teaching. This will help to formulate a considered prosperity doctrine with a 'scale of measurement' upon which all concerned will be able to place themselves. It will also indicate which areas of prosperity teaching find general acceptance and which should be regarded with caution. The 'scale of measurement' for prosperity teaching will provide different categories for individuals to adopt according to the measure of their hermeneutical agreement. It may even be agreed that not all categories, even if legitimate, were intended for all, but for those who have a desire or calling and a measure of faith to operate in that area. First then the hermeneutical strategy is reviewed.

The Considered Hermeneutical Strategy

Introduction – The considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 was formulated to evaluate the interpretation of parties to the prosperity debate. Each aspect will be considered in turn accompanied by an assessment of the extent to which each feature is adopted by the prosperity teachers and their critics.

The Scripture Principle – As presented by Pinnock and Callen, Scripture is to be regarded as the authoritative source of doctrine for believers, as subscribed to by all in the prosperity debate.² However, the strong adherence of some to this principle has led to an unwarranted restriction of possible interpretations, contrary to Treier's claim that a given scripture may have a range of different senses.³ The critics of a traditionalist persuasion implement the Scripture principle by allowing only a restricted interpretation, and are therefore predisposed to oppose a particular interpretation, where the significance varies, even though legitimate. Yong observes that the differing scholars in the debate may come to Scripture with different presuppositional filters which colour their proposed interpretation.⁴

Word-faith prosperity teachers including Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, desire to present the teaching of the whole Bible by showing how these doctrines can be traced through the whole of Scripture, from the Garden of Eden, and Avanzini pursues balance between the teaching of OT and NT (see §4.2.6.).

Among the non-Word-faith prosperity teachers, Francis and Keesee, give due attention to the Scripture principle and to the teaching of the whole Bible. De Silva focusses on just one verse, but does take account of Scripture as a whole. Francis draws upon a wide range of texts in her teaching, also demonstrating that she is not limited by a confined view of what may be a legitimate interpretation. Keesee also draws his texts from most parts of the Bible.

The critics also support the Scripture principle, in giving a balanced view of the Bible's teaching. Some, including McConnell, give counter-arguments couched more in terms of agreement with tradition. Also, prosperity teachers are discredited by their critics citing their perceived suspicious connections, rather than for their interpretation of Scripture. Fee, offers an in-depth hermeneutical strategy but does not demonstrate its implementation in arriving at his conclusions.

² Pinnock & Callen, *Scripture Principle*, 11.

³ Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 200.

⁴ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 27.

Author's Intent, Meaning and Significance – This second tenet of the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 is based largely on the teaching of Hirsch who regarded the intention of the author as the starting point for forming the meaning of literature.⁵ A helpful further teaching to emerge is the existence of a central, invariable core meaning, but having a variety of applications or implications.⁶ Thus, as Cotterrell and Turner affirm, applications can vary but may not be inconsistent with the core meaning.⁷ But Vanhoozer expressed caution in this regard questioning the wisdom of seeking the author's intent from outside of Scripture (see §3.3.5.).⁸

Generally speaking, it is observed that Word-faith prosperity teachers give little consideration to the author's intent, drawing largely upon the superficial meaning of the texts in question causing their interpretation to be called into question to some degree. For example, Kenneth Copeland refers to the parable of the sower (see §4.2.4.) suggesting an application apparently far from the intent of Matthew or Mark (Matt 13:3-9, Mark 4:1-20), yet, arguably, not inconsistent with it. Avanzini, likewise shows little regard for Paul's intent of raising awareness for famine relief in his interpretation (2 Cor 9:6-10, §4.2.6.). The exception with this would be Savelle, who does apply the meaning and significance distinction in his writings and does apply varying yet potentially legitimate interpretations of the scriptures.

Non-Word-faith prosperity teachers give the impression of a more careful and sensitive application of Scripture, drawing valid if divergent interpretations from the scriptures addressed. However, with the critics, it is difficult to identify any regard for the author's intent. Indeed, it is observed that the critics, particularly Hanegraaff, are prone to pluck an ill-fitting scripture from obscurity to support their criticism. For example, Hanegraaff uses Luke 16:19-31 to make the point that the possession of wealth would have an adverse effect upon a believer in the afterlife.⁹ But that is a typically ill-fitting scripture because the interpretation ought surely to refer to the use of wealth rather than simply to possessing it.

Selection of Texts – The basic teaching is that to be termed scriptural a doctrine must find support from a range of scriptures. As Perriman reasonably concludes, if Word-

⁵ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 231-3; *Aims of Interpretation*, 146-58.

⁶ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 103-26; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23.

⁷ Cotterrell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 100.

⁸ Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text?* 77.

⁹ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 188.

faith prosperity teachers can be shown to be relying on a very few scriptures not well distributed throughout the Bible, then it would call their teaching into question.¹⁰

Accordingly, Word-faith prosperity teachers do indeed support their teaching with a fairly small but quite well distributed selection of texts. Certainly, an expansion of their scriptural base would add credibility to their teaching. However, the critics also appear to have a poor selection of texts, particularly in the case of McConnell (see §7.2.2.).

Genre and Historical Context – Those familiar with Scripture apparently acquire an intuitive awareness of the rules of interpretation, including an adjustment of the interpretation of a text based on its genre. Thus, in reading from a psalm, for example, the reader allows for the poetic language and graphic illustrations, whereas instructions of Jesus or Paul in the NT are taken in a more direct manner.¹¹ In general, Word-faith prosperity teachers do not give significant attention to genre or typology in their hermeneutics, preferring to apply direct contractual hermeneutics, drawing what is perceived to be direct teaching for believers from any scripture. However, allowance must be made for an intuitive awareness of genre because of the wide experience of Word-faith prosperity teachers. Kenneth Copeland makes little apparent attempt to allow for genre and likewise, Avanzini shows only modest regard for the literary context in interpretation. In addressing prosperity issues from Isaiah or Mark or from a letter, the same direct approach is adopted by Copeland, making no adjustment for genre or historical context (see §4.2.4.). Avanzini also, for example, makes no overt reference to genre in applying 2 Kings 4:1-7 on the widow and Elisha or 1 Peter 5:7 for contemporary believers (see §4.2.6.).

Non-Word-faith prosperity teachers have a little more regard for these principles, for Keesee, for example, makes some allowance for genre in his treatment of Proverbs 10:22, showing its place in redemption history and how the curse is cancelled for NT believers. There is little concern for genre among the critics of Word-faith prosperity teaching, who nonetheless espouse grammatico-historical methods of interpretation. With McConnell, this would be because he refers to few OT scriptures and his unexpected interpretation probably has more to do with a lack of perception of what is being said rather than the need to allow for genre or historical context. Hanegraaff,

¹⁰ Perriman, *Faith & Prosperity*, 84.

¹¹ McCartney & Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 223; Cotterell & Turner, *Linguistics and Interpretation*, 99.

also, makes little allowance for genre in his interpretation of OT scriptures.

Transition from OT to NT - This is important when applying OT scriptures to a contemporary believer's situation, where such aspects as the use of typology need to be considered.¹² Word-faith prosperity teachers show negligible concern for this aspect. However, Roberts referred to debt cancellation in the ministry of Elisha the prophet, since Elisha can have clear typological representation of the Spirit-anointed followers of Jesus.¹³ Roberts, it appears, has adopted better hermeneutical principles than his critics. Also, Hagin shows how OT scriptures have a NT application, whilst Kenneth Copeland has some regard for applying typology appropriately. Savelle, however, appears to treat OT and NT scriptures alike (see §§4.2.2, 4 & 8.).

With the non-Word-faith prosperity teachers, the principles of transition from the OT to contemporary believers are not clear, except that Francis gives some explanation regarding the analogy of land (see §6.2.2.). Pick substantiates his teaching, based on the OT, but with reasonable allowance for transition to the NT and beyond. De Silva also does give some guidance on the NT application of OT scriptures. With the critics, however, little reference is made to OT scriptures so this principle is not an issue for them.

Spirit and Interpretation - It is widely acknowledged that the Spirit who inspired Scripture will also guide the interpretation and illuminate Scripture for those who seek his guidance. Therefore, as Osborne acknowledges, we are Spirit-dependent in receiving instruction from Scripture.¹⁴ Furthermore, he perceives that the significance or application of Scripture is also Spirit-inspired. The Spirit, accordingly, adds meaning beyond that of the human author.¹⁵ Marshall sees it as the Spirit's role to give the believer the deeper meaning or *sensus plenior* of the text.¹⁶ Yong further proposes the pneumatological imagination, where the inspired imagination adds new dimensions to one's understanding of Scripture, subject to confirmation from the community of fellow believers.¹⁷

This aspect is broadly accepted by Word-faith prosperity teachers who routinely look

¹² Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 328; McCartney and Clayton, *Reader Understand*, 163.

¹³ Roberts, *Get Out of Debt Supernaturally*, 31.

¹⁴ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 22-3.

¹⁵ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 126.

¹⁶ Marshall, 'Introduction', 16.

¹⁷ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 222, 282-5.

for a deeper meaning of Scripture with the Spirit's help. The pneumatological imagination is also probably a preferred method of interpretation. Non-Word-faith prosperity teachers also expect to look for a deeper meaning, as mentioned by De Silva (see §6.2.8.). There is some confusion concerning the Spirit's illumination among the critics, for MacArthur warns against excessive spiritualisation, whilst others remarkably say that Word-faith prosperity teachers do not make sufficient use of the illumination of the Spirit. Indeed, where critics have a Calvinistic philosophy they are less inclined to seek the Spirit's illumination, perhaps explaining their tendency to attach to just one restricted interpretation of Scripture with little allowance for Spirit-enlightened significance.

Conclusion – The evidence presented shows that none of the contributors to the prosperity debate presented a comprehensive hermeneutical strategy. The non-Word-faith prosperity teachers have been more careful in presenting their arguments, whereas the critics have been lacking in any convincing application of the hermeneutical strategy. Word-faith prosperity teachers are not casual students of Scripture but regard the illumination of the Spirit as very important in their hermeneutical approach. Therefore the conclusion suggested is that greater balance is needed between cognitive hermeneutics and Spirit inspired interpretation.

8.2.4. Evaluation of the Hermeneutical Strategy

Introduction – This section evaluates the extent to which the hermeneutical strategy adopted is successful in revealing the reliability of the interpretation of Scripture by prosperity teachers and critics. The critics have implied that Word-faith prosperity teachers have run rough-shod over the scholarly exegesis of Scripture and should adopt more scholarly strategies in interpreting it. Yet the evidence suggests that the critics are no more scholarly in their adoption of their hermeneutical strategy.

Hermeneutics of Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – Of the aspects of the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3, Word-faith prosperity teachers emphasise the illumination of the Spirit, producing a somewhat subjective evaluation of the meaning of Scripture. They have focussed on a reasonable range of texts from throughout Scripture and would say that they have revealed their deeper meanings through the illumination of the Spirit. They may, however, give unwitting attention to the meaning/significance distinction where the surface meaning of a text is accompanied by further significance through the Spirit. This does not represent outright error as

much as imbalance and a frequent neglect of the OT and NT authors' intent and their historical context and genre. They, of course, espouse Pentecostal or charismatic doctrines giving rise to their particular emphases. However, Word-faith prosperity teachers are apparently not casual or slip-shod with their interpretation of Scripture. Kenneth Copeland, for example, will spend hours meditating on a scripture waiting for the Spirit's illumination in place of conventional scholarly exegesis.¹⁸ Thus, it is apparent that Word-faith prosperity teachers hold Scripture in the highest esteem. However, some broadening of the range of scriptures selected would add credibility to their teaching, as well as some attention given to genre and the continuity between OT and NT scriptures.

Conclusion – The evidence is that the considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 is successful in evaluating Word-faith interpretation of Scripture. It appears to comprehensively highlight their legitimate interpretive techniques and also areas of apparent neglect, for no overt notice is taken of genre or historical context, always bearing in mind that adjustment for these aspects may have been intuitive and unconscious. However, this represents a significant area of uncertainty not necessarily covered by what some regard as an excessive reliance upon the illumination of the Spirit. The comparison of their findings with the interpretation of contemporary commentators has proved successful as a complement to hermeneutical assessment. The findings here too are that many basic concepts are endorsed but some more extreme aspects are not supported. (For evaluation please see §5.3.2.)

Hermeneutics of Non-Word-Faith Prosperity Teachers – The hermeneutical strategy is effective in evaluating non-Word-faith prosperity teaching, exposing similar strengths and weaknesses as Word-faith prosperity teaching. It reveals a fairly narrow selection of texts with only superficial attention to genre and historical context, with perhaps somewhat less emphasis on the illumination of the Spirit. Yet, there is a scholarly approach producing broad agreement with the interpretation of contemporary commentators.

Conclusion - As a hermeneutical strategy, it performs satisfactorily revealing the weaknesses of non-Word-faith prosperity teaching. So, non-Word-faith prosperity teaching is supported by broad agreement with the interpretation of Scripture by contemporary commentators, despite the perceived weaknesses in terms of its

¹⁸ Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity*, 57-8.

hermeneutical strategy. Although some aspects of interpretation are undoubtedly overlooked by the superficial attention to genre and historical context, those hermeneutical aspects which are adopted appear to gain support from the interpretation of the scriptures quoted and give adequate support to the general principles of their prosperity message.

Hermeneutics of the Critics – The attitude of many of the critics is clearly hostile as revealed by the polemic nature of their criticisms. DeArteaga interestingly suggests that this hostility is a manifestation of a spirit of pharisaism, expressed as legalism and an opposition to the work of the Spirit.¹⁹ Thus, he identifies a tendency to emphasize the non-spiritual, non-intuitive aspects of interpretation, favouring the cognitive process of gathering the views from various parts of the Bible, focussing on the grammatico-historical analysis of Scripture. Yet their hostile attacks on Word-faith prosperity teachers make no apparent reference to these, based rather on a superficial determination of the interpretation of the supporting scriptures. With McConnell, it was accompanied by an attack upon the historical roots of this movement, primarily upon Kenyon (see §7.2.2.). This then represents an even less satisfactory hermeneutical approach, also accompanied by the dubious practice of justifying or vilifying a teaching on the basis of what or who influenced its formation, rather than its consistency with the interpretation of Scripture.

Furthermore, the scriptures chosen to oppose Word-faith prosperity teaching are shown by contemporary commentators to have a different interpretation from those suggested by the critics (see §7.2.2.). The texts selected purported to teach that wealth was unrighteous and to be avoided whereas the considered view expressed by the scholars was that wealth was not evil of itself but had dangers associated with it, the major ones being the love of money and the pursuit of money for its own sake. Also, many of the texts quoted described the obstacle that wealth was to conversion, with little application to those who were saved and yet financially challenged. If these verses had been used to present the temptation that increased prosperity might present to the believer, this would have been a useful contribution to the debate, but to impose presuppositional views, which the scriptures could not legitimately support, was unhelpful.

Conclusion – Word-faith prosperity critics have not helped their case in this debate, as

¹⁹ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 16.

acknowledged by the more scholarly writers on the subject. Although there has undoubtedly been excess with unworthy practices among prosperity teachers, the prosperity message itself should not on this basis be rejected. The shortcomings of Word-faith prosperity hermeneutics should be acknowledged and their teachers should do more to demonstrate the validity of its position among the doctrines of Christianity, with a significant message to a suffering world.

8.2.5. Overall Conclusion

The evidence is that the hermeneutical strategy effectively evaluates the interpretation of all three groups of teachers, and with the interpretation of contemporary commentators, enables a degree of certainty to be reached for each of the major doctrines of the prosperity teachers. For Word-faith prosperity teachers, the Scripture principle is strongly supported together with the derivation and significance for the surface meaning. The illumination of the Spirit also reveals deeper meanings, also accepted by them. However, significantly less overt recognition of genre or historical context is demonstrated, whilst the author's intent is sometimes overlooked. Despite this evident imbalance in their hermeneutical methods, there appears to be broad agreement on their major doctrine with the contemporary commentators. This would represent a cautious acceptance of primary Word-faith prosperity principles with a more guarded response to their more extreme views, whilst not dismissing the possibility of miraculous, divine intervention.

Non-Word-faith prosperity teaching is broadly accepted, giving support to their major prosperity principles. Trusting God financially and asking for his provision are regarded as legitimate, whilst also teaching on the renewing of the mind in order to ask wisely. Their views are somewhat more trusted, because there are fewer extremes, yet their themes support the main aspects of Word-faith prosperity teaching. The critics, however, have appealed vigorously for a more scholarly exegesis among prosperity teachers, but despite their hostile complaints it appears that their own hermeneutical practices have been even less satisfactory than those they criticised, often with a completely mistaken interpretation of the scriptures applied when compared to the rendering of the independent commentators consulted.

Thus, as mentioned, the considered hermeneutical strategy is effective in evaluating the interpretation of Scripture by all concerned, successfully showing their strengths and weaknesses. The interpretation of the scriptures concerned by contemporary

commentators has been useful, their opinions fruitfully adding to the study an interpretation of the scriptures, using, it is believed, a hermeneutical strategy similar to that of chapter 3.

8.3. Theological Issues

8.3.1. Introduction

This thesis now seeks to provide an assessment of prosperity teaching in the writings of two highly regarded Pentecostal theologians, with which a comparison with the assessment of prosperity teaching in this thesis may be achieved. Yong and Frank Macchia, the Pentecostal theologians, have written chapters in an edited volume of 2012, entitled *Pentecostalism and Prosperity*.²⁰ This book is a phenomenological survey of Pentecostalism and prosperity in various settings around the world. It is not a theological examination of the issues involved and nor does it offer research on the writings of Word-faith prosperity teachers and their critics. However, the introduction by Yong and the theological response by Macchia both provide a theological appraisal of prosperity teaching for comparison.

8.3.2. Yong's Five Arguments

Yong traces the pervasiveness of the prosperity message around the world in diverse Christian groupings including traditional Pentecostal churches, independent charismatic churches and those involved in the Roman Catholic charismatic renewal. He summarises the response to the prosperity gospel in five different possible arguments which are explained below.²¹

For Prosperity – The first argument is that Scripture promises salvation of souls and material prosperity (3 John 2), demonstrated by Christ's ministry to the whole person and by other OT stories. This positive teaching generates hope in destitute situations and promotes actions to overcome poverty, demonstrating that Christianity is good news for the poor (Luke 4:18).²²

Against Prosperity – Yong observes the opponents' argument that Scripture as a whole does not support the prosperity message believing that Jesus had a simple lifestyle and

²⁰ Amos Yong, 'A Typology of Prosperity Theology: A Religious Economy of Global Renewal or a Renewal Economics?' and Frank D. Macchia, 'A Call for Careful Discernment: A Theological Response to Prosperity Preaching,' in Katharine Attanasi and Amos Yong (eds.), *Pentecostalism and Prosperity, The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) 15-33, 225-237.

²¹ Yong, 'Typology of Prosperity', 17.

²² Yong, 'Typology of Prosperity', 18-19.

relied upon the support of others who happened to be wealthy (Luke 8:1-3).²³ They note also Paul's simple lifestyle as one sometimes in great need, and who taught about the dangers of wanting to be rich, and of the love of money (1 Tim 6:9-10). Yong observes that such critics are predominantly middle class white Americans no longer affected by poverty. They are, however, opposed to the 'rhetorical exploitation of a theological theme' which would be an unworthy pursuit.²⁴ Yong now moves on to three more nuanced arguments with regard to the prosperity gospel.

Missional Argument – This describes wealth as neutral, but that it is the *love* of money which causes evil (1 Tim 6:10). There is also a belief that the wealth of the world is stored up for the benefit of God's people who would use it, for the work of evangelisation.²⁵ He quotes Acts 2:45 regarding selling land to give to the needy. However, this does not quite appear to fit the model he has suggested, for this is believers divesting themselves of their valuable assets to provide only temporary relief for the needy, which hardly fits the context of funds used for evangelism. But it is the use of funding for evangelism and for alleviating poverty that provides a justification for seeking prosperity.

Contextual Argument – Prosperity is regarded as part of the outworking of salvation, so for impoverished people, the gospel offers the realistic hope of relief from poverty.²⁶ Thus, in the continents of Latin America, Africa and Asia, those who become believers are encouraged to believe God for jobs, for an income to pay bills and for rescue from debts, and even for promotion in their workplace. So, prosperity is placed within the context of a higher quality of life for the follower of Christ, similar to the 'higher Christian life' of the forerunners of Word-faith prosperity teachers (see §1.6.3.).

Balanced Argument – Here Yong considers the area that Hagin mentioned in his final book, *The Midas Touch* (see §4.2.3.), on a balanced argument for prosperity. Inevitably, this results in rejecting certain aspects of the prosperity gospel, which Yong says is justified in terms of the whole biblical witness. However, the results have much in keeping with the teachings of the commentators of Word-faith prosperity, where elements which find reasonable biblical support for living simply,

²³ Yong, 'Typology of Prosperity', 19-21.

²⁴ Yong, 'Typology of Prosperity', 21.

²⁵ Yong, 'Typology of Prosperity', 21.

²⁶ Yong, 'Typology of Prosperity', 23.

working hard, practising biblical stewardship and sharing unselfishly find acceptance.²⁷ Such a prosperity gospel, deprived of all miraculous elements, would provide little comfort for the impoverished third world individual without job or land. Yet it does offer benefits for those who cannot accept the miraculous elements of the prosperity gospel.

Conclusion – Yong charts a range of possible formulations of the prosperity gospel suggesting that it represents part of Christ's ministry to the whole believer whilst also offering hope to the destitute. The simple lifestyles of Christ and Paul seem to be in contrast with the general belief in improved prosperity, but the *missional* and *contextual* arguments project a view of the prosperity of believers to the point where funds are released for evangelism and to provide relief from poverty. The *balanced* approach has merit in that it follows certain scriptures but essentially denies the believer any hope of miraculous intervention in financial affairs and is therefore on this basis of only marginal benefit to the believer.

8.3.3. Macchia's Theological Response to Prosperity Teaching

Introduction – Macchia responds to the breadth of prosperity teaching by asking whether it is 'a valid contextualisation of the gospel', or a cynical 'syncretistic accommodation of an alien doctrine' at odds with the gospel of Christ.²⁸ He declares that all sides in this debate have much more in common than divides them, observing ambiguity in defining the gospel with room for new expressions. He warns of the fine line between 'a challenging new rendition and a heretical departure from it'.²⁹

Theological Observations - Pentecostal and charismatic churches emphasize the work of the Spirit in bringing blessings of faith in Christ and material well-being. Macchia proposes that the major tenets of the prosperity gospel should be regarded as 'valid contextualisation', but that its extreme forms reduce the gospel to only a prosperity message.³⁰ Such reductionism calls into question the prosperity gospel as a valid witness. Where the prosperity message remains ancillary to receiving the blessings of Christ, it is a legitimate concept but not necessarily the centre of the gospel. However, it is perceived to be essential to it, for the covenant in Christ delivers believers from

²⁷ Yong, 'Typology of Prosperity', 25-6.

²⁸ Macchia, 'Theological Response', 225.

²⁹ Macchia, 'Theological Response', 226.

³⁰ Macchia, 'Theological Response', 228.

the curse, including the curse of poverty.³¹

Macchia's Perspective on these Observations - Macchia considers that he cannot give a straightforward answer to the question as to whether the prosperity message is a faithful expression of the gospel of Christ, but part of his conclusion is that, if the prosperity teaching does not reduce the gospel to personal prosperity only, then it may be viewed as a legitimate contextualisation of the gospel message rather than a heretical accommodation of it.³² However, he affirms that the whole gospel teaching must be applied, so that the teaching of the cross might be utilized with prosperity teaching.³³ Therefore, one is advised to avoid triumphalism by reflecting upon the cross, providing an attitude of self-sacrifice for the mission of God.

Macchia makes the point that one must respect the sovereignty of the Spirit, by depending on his leading in faith, noting from Scripture that both the righteous and the unrighteous receive periods of prosperity and of hardship from God (Matt 5:45). Thus divine providence is not always clear or understood, and yet he regards it as possible for new movements to 'offer a novel way of contextualising the gospel while still remaining essentially true to it'.³⁴ Macchia takes careful note that millions have drawn fresh hope and encouragement through prosperity preaching enabling the gospel to renew them. Therefore one should take it seriously as likely a work of the Spirit.³⁵ Also, it must be remembered that the critics will be judged by the same criteria that they apply, for he asserts that one can enhance the work of the kingdom of God if one exercises the kind of pastoral care for this movement that will make the witness of Christ brighter and clearer.³⁶

Conclusion – As Macchia advises, the prosperity gospel and prosperity teachers need pastoring and this requires a closer attachment to the community of believers including scholarly advisers who are not hostile to the prosperity message in principle. Furthermore, respect for the sovereignty of the Spirit, which he advises, is important and not easily determined, especially for those whose doctrinal position has no significant reference to the role of the Spirit in the life of believers. It is however agreed with Macchia that sowing and reaping can never be reduced to a tried and true

³¹ Macchia, 'Theological Response', 229.

³² Macchia, 'Theological Response', 232.

³³ Macchia, 'Theological Response', 234.

³⁴ Macchia, 'Theological Response', 235.

³⁵ Macchia, 'Theological Response', 236.

³⁶ Macchia, 'Theological Response', 236.

formula, since this would not be true to the sovereignty of the Spirit.

8.3.4. Overall Conclusion

The perspectives of Yong and Macchia offer a reasonable consensus with the outcomes of this thesis, supporting the belief that prosperity teaching may represent a legitimate expression of contemporary Christianity. Yong suggests a balanced non-miraculous prosperity message as one option, but also allows that prosperity may be part of what it means to be a believer. Macchia agrees but warns that the prosperity message must not take the central ground and must therefore be taken together with all the other equally important aspects of the gospel.

8.4. Final Assessment of Thesis

8.4.1. Introduction

Following a broad scope of consensus between these Pentecostal scholars and the various teachers of the prosperity gospel, this section proposes a theological framework encompassing the full range of prosperity teaching which can be used to classify the different aspects taught by those concerned. It evaluates the perceived concept of two financial policies, the secular one, affected by the curse on the one hand and that emanating from the kingdom of God on the other. The financial dealings consistent with the kingdom of God are characterised by righteousness, wisdom and faith, where trust and generosity will receive his blessing, whereas the secular system is affected by the curse and perhaps characterised by robbery and lack. These will be considered and a theological framework is constructed as a guide for believers' scriptural financial arrangements offering guidance on three categories of my categorised prosperity theology, also providing a scale of measurement for the various aspects of prosperity doctrine. These, then, are classified as firstly *righteousness*, secondly *wisdom* and thirdly *the application of faith*, so that believers would be able to position themselves on this scale of prosperity teaching consistent with their Christian experience and acceptance of the topics raised. So, even the critics could find guidance from it as well as the commentators of the scholarly context (see §1.4.).

8.4.2. An Evaluation of the Concept of the Two Financial Systems

Introduction - The existence of two distinct financial systems, *God's financial system*, characterised by faith, and generosity and *the world's financial system* involving debt and robbery is taught by both Word-faith and non-Word-faith prosperity teachers.

However, there appears to be little teaching in Scripture regarding such distinct systems. So, this section seeks to determine whether these concepts are a figment of prosperity teachers' corporate imagination, or whether there are general principles of Christian doctrine which may be applied to this area to which they may be referring.

The Evaluation - Romans 12:2 implies a rejection of old ways of thinking based on worldly wisdom in favour of a conscious change towards trusting in God thereby preventing any influences on one's finances. Thus the *two financial system* teaching may in fact be a stylised reminder to trust in God for financial provision, together with a determination not to allow any resort to worldly ways of conducting one's financial affairs. It must be acknowledged that prosperity teachers have achieved broad consensus with contemporary commentators on the main strands of their teaching, so it would be surprising for them now to depart so completely from accepted interpretation of the scriptures concerned. Prosperity teachers of both camps relate their concept of *two financial systems* to the effects of the curse following the fall (Gen 1 and 3:17-21) and its apparent reversal under the blessing of Abraham, imparted to believers in Christ (Gen 12:1-3, Gal 3:13-14, 29). Kenneth Copeland identified that, as a result of the fall, the earth came under a curse, spreading to all people, and Gloria Copeland teaches that Eden before the fall represented the blessing and peace of God.³⁷ For Keesee, it is the curse that causes secular financial affairs to sometimes fail, hence describing it as the 'earth-curse system'.³⁸ Prosperity teachers generally regard believers as those who have received the blessing of Abraham. So, for believers the curse is broken but the implementation of the blessing requires obedient action through faith according to Avanzini.³⁹ The significance for Francis is that the blessing in Genesis 12 included land which had been the focus of the curse in Genesis 3:17-19, but which would now be the source of prosperity for Abraham and those blessed with his blessing.⁴⁰ De Silva interestingly perceives this transformation from self-effort to trusting in God as an alternative mind-set characteristic of the prosperous soul (Rom 12:2, 3 John 2).⁴¹ Keesee identifies *the curse* as broken in Christ and replaced by the blessing from Abraham. Thus, he concludes, that believers should be

³⁷ Kenneth Copeland, *Blessing of the Lord*, 67-71; Gloria Copeland, *Blessed Beyond Measure* (New York, NY: FaithWorks, 2008 [2004]) 87, 90.

³⁸ Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 97-98.

³⁹ Avanzini, *Wealth of the World*, 38, 146, 160.

⁴⁰ Francis, *New Levels of Prosperity*, 29-30.

⁴¹ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 20-25.

able to return to an Eden-like state as it was prior to the fall (Prov 10:22, Gal 3:13).⁴²

Instead of referring to *two financial systems* a comparison of Genesis chapters 3 and 12 shows that they could legitimately be described as *the curse* and *the blessing*.

Since *the curse* is seen to result in lack and disappointing returns from hard labour, the only way to increase in wealth would be through harder work or robbery in one form or another, thus described by Keesee as the ‘earth-curse system’. Both *the curse* and *the blessing* involve land referring to the source of one’s income more generally and involve issues of obedience or disobedience, increase or decrease, surplus or insufficiency.

Various scriptures are quoted apparently supporting this divide between *blessing* and *curse*. Two laws are mentioned in Romans 8:2 reflecting this divide, namely *the law of sin and death* and the *law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*. In John 10:10 Jesus describes the thief’s plan to steal and to destroy whilst Jesus brings life. In addition, non-Word-faith prosperity teachers emphasize the dichotomy between worldly principles and transforming the mind (Rom 12:2).⁴³ They therefore imply remaining in *the blessing* and avoiding *the curse*, financially. But the wisdom advocated also involves a departure from self-sufficiency (see §5.2.3.) with a recommended commitment to God as the source of supply. They believe the blessing of Abraham (Gal 3:13-14) is granted because the curse is broken and the Spirit is promised in Christ.

Kenneth Copeland’s work *The Blessing of the Lord* describes God’s dealings with humanity from Eden to the present day. This applies to all areas of life and prosperity teachers apparently discuss the financial arrangements under the *blessing*, since the curse is broken. Commentators correctly point out that there are no definite references to two specific financial systems, but prosperity teachers appear justified in identifying appropriate financial applications of *the curse* and *the blessing*. Moreover, the financial principles of the *blessing* could reasonably be identified as faith and generosity.

Assessment – The proposed financial distinctions between *the curse* and *the blessing* suggest that the prosperity gospel provides steady and progressive transition between them, which would not therefore be automatic at conversion. Accordingly, the

⁴² Keesee, *Fixing the Money Thing*, 97-8.

⁴³ De Silva, *Prosperous Soul*, 25; Francis, *Ultimate Secret*, 103-4.

categorised prosperity classification which follows offers not only an evaluation of theological positions, but also provides a step-by-step transition from *the curse* to *the blessing*. In such a transition it is proposed that righteousness, trust in God, wisdom and faith would potentially replace unrighteousness, self-sufficiency, naivety and unbelief manifested under the curse.

8.4.3. Three Category Classification of Prosperity Teaching

Introduction - The findings of prosperity teachers therefore suggest a categorised prosperity classification, substantial elements of which would be common to both Word-faith and non-Word-faith teachers. Three categories are proposed, firstly, the *righteousness* category, consisting of tithing, righteous financial dealings and honouring one's financial obligations. The second aspect is the *wisdom* category, dealing with important precautions in one's personal finances including avoiding debt, moderating expenditure, saving and generating a surplus. One may reasonably conclude that taking steps to implement categories one and two of the categorised financial classification could significantly improve one's finances. Although taught by prosperity teachers, there is no particular miraculous dimension. The third feature proposed is the *faith* category involving the exercise of faith for a miraculous dimension, involving giving and the grace it imparts for prosperous returns on giving (2 Cor 9:8). More contentious elements include positive confession, naming one's seed (i.e. the desired outcome from donation), the hundredfold return, miraculous debt cancellation and treasure in heaven. These three categories are reviewed and analysed here.

Category 1 – Righteousness - The righteousness category emphasizes the principle of tithing as an important aspect of *righteousness*. Word-faith teachers regard tithing as a financial obligation even when funds are limited (see §5.2.4.) and non-Word-faith teachers regard diligence in tithing as an issue of financial honesty (see §6.2.4.). Therefore their teaching is that the first step in implementing God's financial principles is to obey regarding tithing (see §6.3.2.). The conclusion is that tithing positions the believer for God's blessing and represents one aspect of honesty and integrity in financial matters for the believer (see §6.4.).

Word-faith teachers note from 3 John 2 that spiritual integrity is a priority and must not be sacrificed for the pursuit of finance (see §5.2.2.). Moreover, from the blessing

of Abraham they observe that material blessing should bring relief to others as well as to oneself and that hoarding must be rejected (see §5.2.3.). The issue of *righteousness* this raises is that the believer must avoid the love of money, but rather should use money to do good (see §7.3.3. & 5.). Other aspects of the *righteousness* category are seen as rejecting unrighteous sources of income (see §5.2.3.), and diligently paying what one owes at the right time, when in debt (see §5.2.4.). It also involves ensuring one's desires are good, preferably God-given, and not for selfish indulgence (see §5.2.5.). Non-Word-faith teachers remind believers of the importance of righteous financial dealings as those released from the curse, who would be foolish to neglect God's principles of honesty (see §6.3.3.).

Assessment – The proposal is that tithing and financial honesty whilst avoiding hoarding and the love of money will represent a tangible commitment to conduct one's financial affairs in a manner pleasing to God, whilst also expressing trust in his provision.

Category 2 – Wisdom – The *wisdom* category appears to present the following strategies for financial prosperity. Firstly, the non-Word-faith theme of renewing the mind is believed to be an important aspect. A renewed mind is one that has a 'kingdom prosperity mind-set', as a result of which the believer thinks well of himself and avoids a poverty mentality or lust for wealth (see De Silva §6.2.8.). According to their theme 3 the renewed mind also expects blessing and the fulfilment of personal dreams (see §6.3.4.). Word-faith theme 4 also sees that such a mind-set would avoid negative and despondent speech while remaining hopeful as expressed in optimistic declarations in line with the Word of God (see §5.2.5.). One beneficial outcome of the renewed mind is that one asks wisely and in line with the will of God (see §6.3.4.).

Another aspect of the *wisdom* category is the value of making financial donations. Word-faith teachers regard this as storing treasure in heaven. This is advised because it means the funds are safe from loss and have the possibility of producing multiplied returns on the investment (see §5.2.6.). Prosperity teachers also recommend creating a surplus by carefully controlled expenditure, so that one will have something to give, perceived to be a means of producing improved general prosperity (see §5.2.4.). There is also support from the critics and commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching

that creating a surplus is valuable through the avoidance of debt and the moderation of personal expenditure (§7.2.3. & §7.3.2.).

A major aspect of the *wisdom* category is the avoidance of debt. Word-faith teachers urge the avoidance of debt if at all possible, and where loans cannot be avoided, they advise keeping them at manageable levels (see §5.2.4.). Non-Word-faith teachers are of the same opinion advising against debt and promoting God's principles for financial planning. Thereby they recommend rejecting loans, seeking God's blessing and being generous (see §6.2.6. and §6.3.4.). This subject also finds agreement with certain of the commentators of Word-faith teaching advising that prosperity is to be found by moderating expenses and avoiding debt (see §7.2.3. and §7.3.2.). The final dimension of the *wisdom* category is to place one's trust in God for financial needs and for his solutions. Such wisdom also involves the avoidance of the world's financial practices as recommended by Keesee (see §6.2.6.). As a result the believer should no longer be subject to arduous, poorly paid labour, but rather should be experiencing fruitful, blessed work (see §6.3.3.). The outcome, then, perceived by prosperity teachers is that agreement with and implementation of the word of God should enable believers to experience improved personal prosperity and financial control (see §6.3.4.).

Assessment - The *wisdom* category is much less controversial than much prosperity teaching, and would possibly be agreed in some aspects even by the critics. Yet this message would benefit believers by being more widely received by them, for it represents applying wisdom in an area neglected by so many. It would be all the more significant if, as suggested, there is demonic involvement in believers increasing debt unwisely, since loan repayments would leave no surplus for good works. The wisdom of seeking God for finance ensures his grace will provide sufficient funds for making donations (2 Cor 9:10). Although not a miraculous strategy, avoiding debt, stewarding one's finances, avoiding extravagance and accumulating a surplus would represent a radical and substantial transformation for many in their financial affairs. Therefore, for the believer in debt, taking steps to reduce it will begin the process of financial independence, which, taken together with tithing and righteous financial dealings, will establish a secure financial foundation from which further strategies may be adopted.

Category 3 – The Faith Category –The strategies of this category are reviewed one by one with an appraisal of their evaluation and implications as to their suitability for

adoption by believers seeking to exercise faith for finances. The essential element of this third category is *faith* with generosity as taught primarily by Word-faith teachers, as set out below.

Giving and Receiving by Faith – Faith for financial prosperity was a theme of some of the forerunners of Word-faith prosperity teaching, including Simpson and Peale (see §2.3.4).⁴⁴ Kenneth and Gloria Copeland note Abraham as a role model for receiving by faith, whose faith was equated with righteousness before God (see §4.2.4.).⁴⁵ Savelle also advocates a lifestyle of faith without fainting (see §4.2.8.). Francis suggests applying one's faith to believe that one receives after asking specifically (see §6.2.2.). Robert's *seed-faith* teaching was in keeping with this aspect, as suggested by Luke 6:38 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-10, where financial gifts are made in the belief that they will produce a harvest.⁴⁶ As Savelle and he affirm, the measure of the return depends on the measure of one's giving and the measure of one's faith (see §4.2.8.).⁴⁷ De Silva adds that giving will ultimately bring relief from debt (see §6.2.8.). Francis notes that the principle of sowing and reaping is typologically represented by Israel's use of land as a means to make wealth, enabling people to have resources for life and for giving to others in need (see §6.2.2.).

Assessment - The theme supports the belief that those seeking prosperity should be generous in their giving, and should therefore receive God's grace for the miraculous in their finances. This is perceived to be a suitable theme for believers.

Miraculous Debt Cancellation - One way the miraculous may manifest through faith is by divine intervention to cancel debts. Such a perception is strongly censured by the critics who argue that there is no reason for God to intervene in a situation which is probably of the individual's own making through naivety or foolishness. An understandable position perhaps, yet it may be argued that it is in God's nature to forgive indiscretions and to assist believers in escaping from their own foolishness. Carmichael was reported by Elliott as believing that one should not expect miraculous debt cancellation (see §2.2.5.). Roberts conversely stated that debt was a trap to be

⁴⁴ A.B. Simpson, *A Larger Christian Life* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1998 [1890]) 129-137.

⁴⁵ Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity*, 19-20.

⁴⁶ Roberts, *Miracle of Seed-Faith*, 17, 21, 33.

⁴⁷ Savelle, *Reaping Little*, 29-30, 33.

avoided which God may reasonably assist them to avoid.⁴⁸ Avanzini, too, sees miraculous debt cancellation as a realistic possibility, taking support from Elisha's miraculous ministry regarding debt (2 Kings 4:1-7, see §4.2.6.).

Assessment - Although there does not appear to be any convincing proof as to the guaranteed reliability of this teaching, there is enough scriptural endorsement to support the belief that where a person is seeking God to become debt free and is implementing the reforms mentioned in categories one and two, that God may well be moved to accelerate the process miraculously, as perhaps suggested in the Lord's prayer ('...forgive us our debts ...' Matt 6:12).

Positive Confession – This refers to the believer adopting positive and optimistic speech with positive mental images of happy and successful outcomes in life not yet a present experience. Kinnebrew wrote at length about this concept, presenting a rather sceptical denial of its justification as a Christian activity.⁴⁹ His view is that both history and Scripture show that the doctrine of positive confession is an erroneous one. Yet he admits Moody's view, that he had never known God to use a discouraged person.⁵⁰ DeArteaga supported positive confession as a legitimate scriptural practice, and remarkably believed that the whole of the created world is influenced by the spoken word, quoting modern science in the form of the quantum theory, suggesting that the value of Plank's constant from particle physics determines the extent to which matter is influenced by our speech.⁵¹ This is an interesting and logically sound theory which is, however, as yet not significantly supported by other authors.

Assessment - The advice is to avoid negative, despondent speech replacing it with confident speech expressing one's trust in God's protection in keeping with one's faith. Indeed, in practice, positive confession may produce an optimistic attitude possibly influencing one's circumstances, especially when quoting Scripture. It is difficult, therefore to perceive any harmful effect, if it expresses genuine faith.

Treasure in Heaven and the Heavenly Grant – These aspects have historically been regarded as a blessing in the afterlife, but among Word-faith prosperity teachers this has a special significance. For Kenneth Copeland, laying up treasure in heaven involves giving to two groups in particular; the poor and for those preaching the

⁴⁸ Roberts, *Out of Debt Supernaturally*, 8, 13-14, 66-69.

⁴⁹ Kinnebrew, *Positive Confession*, i.

⁵⁰ Kinnebrew, *Positive Confession*, 254.

⁵¹ DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, 153-4.

gospel (see §4.2.4.). More importantly he expects that believers will be able to make withdrawals from their heavenly account for needs in this life. Savelle, as his disciple, has adopted this teaching developing it further, to successfully apply for heavenly grants in the form of a ‘prayer of petition’ (see §4.2.8.).

Assessment – Because of its wide acceptance in general it is reasonable to adopt the belief that generosity produces ‘treasure in heaven’. However, commentators perceive no application of this beyond unspecified blessings in the afterlife. Kenneth Copeland and Savelle have no other support for this interpretation other than the application of logic and a testimony of its working successfully in practice, in response to their faith. Contemporary believers should therefore treat this teaching with caution.

The Hundredfold Return – Grubb, wrote of pioneer C T Studd that he gave away his family fortune, confident of receiving a hundredfold return in this life as one who believed it and acted upon it (see §2.2.4). Avanzini also affirms that the hundredfold return is achievable for believers (see §4.2.6.). Gloria Copeland believed similarly and received much criticism for her belief, which criticism was based almost entirely on its perceived illogicality and unlikelihood of such a teaching working in practice. She believes she has received some successful returns, but points out that the hundredfold return is only required to come sometime in this life (Mark 10:29-30).⁵²

Assessment – The hundredfold return was one of the teachings which Hagin later distanced himself from because of its perceived complete improbability.⁵³ But perhaps he overlooked Jesus’ own demonstration, when more than a hundredfold return was experienced in the context of ministry needs and for the glory of God (John 2:1-11, Matt 14:14-21). It was not a matter of routine and not primarily for personal needs. Indeed, for most Christians their moderate faith would be likely to achieve a significantly smaller return, rather than the thirty, sixty and a hundredfold of the parable (Mark 4:20). But even so it would appear to represent a significant incentive to give generously as led by the Lord, with the prospect of having more available for one’s needs and for charitable donations (2 Cor 9:8).

Other aspects relating to category 3 drawn from all contributors to the debate, as supported by the commentators are that, firstly there should be reliance upon the Spirit for faith for miraculous provision. With his guidance, then, one can be generous as an

⁵² Gloria Copeland, *God’s Will is Prosperity*, 69, 75-6.

⁵³ Hagin, *Midas Touch*, 146-150.

expression of faith in God's on-going provision. Francis, in particular, believes that one should believe for one's wealth as an heir of Abraham and should expect to prosper, because the Spirit with faith can turn barren situations around. For Barth claims, that modest faith can do the impossible (see §5.2.5.). Therefore, one should give in faith as led by the Lord, trusting him for continuing provision. Giving may be perceived as a sacrifice but one should maintain a positive attitude of expectancy in challenging circumstances.

8.4.4. Overall Conclusion

The establishment of two financial systems referred to as the *blessing* and the *curse*, broadly encompassing godly and worldly financial arrangements is established. The three category prosperity classification, derived in this thesis, therefore offers systematic transition between the proposed two systems. Accordingly, a transfer to God's financial policies is initiated by a commitment to righteous financial dealings along with regular tithing and also avoidance of the love of money and hoarding money for self. The second category offers practical financial wisdom. It incorporates avoiding debt, financial restraint and the creation of a surplus for charitable donations. The third category offers encouragement to believers to exercise faith in their generosity, which allegedly imparts grace to the giver ensuring God's miraculous influences in one's finances. This may manifest as multiplied financial returns, with possible heavenly grants and miraculous debt reduction. This is also enhanced, it is suggested, by maintaining optimism in one's speech with the declaration of suitable scriptures. Although controversial, there remains the possibility that generosity, faith and positive confession will have a positive influence on one's financial well-being, overcoming debt with God's help.

8.5. Final Conclusion

The considered hermeneutical strategy of chapter 3 appears to have proved effective in evaluating Word-faith and non-Word-faith teaching as well as that of the critics and commentators of Word-faith prosperity teaching, also supported by the views of contemporary commentators. This, then, gives a degree of certainty regarding the primary principles of Word-faith prosperity teaching with a more guarded response to its extreme views, whilst still being open to the possibility of divine intervention in these matters. Non-Word-faith teaching is similarly broadly supported by this hermeneutic although it presents a more trusted approach. The critics, however,

evidently adopted an even less significant implementation of these hermeneutical principles. Apparently, their somewhat superficial research has caused them to arrive at skewed conclusions, obscuring valuable insights into the possible levels of Christian prosperity teaching and impairing believers' perceptions over these issues.

Concerning the theological issues raised, Yong and Macchia provide a reasonable consensus with the outcomes of this thesis. They broadly support the prosperity message as a legitimate expression of contemporary Christianity. Yong's more nuanced arguments propose a moderate non-miraculous prosperity message, but he believes it may be regarded as a normal part of Christian experience. Macchia, on balance also supports the concept of Christian prosperity provided it does not take the central ground without due consideration of the other aspects of the gospel.

In view of the various aspects of this prosperity gospel, a three category approach is proposed. This represents an original contribution made by this thesis offering a plan for financial restoration for all believers, whatever their denominational affiliation. It offers advice for avoiding worldly concepts and secular financial strategies whilst offering, instead, insight into financial policies consistent with legitimate interpretation of Scripture, whilst aiming to remove any possible curse on believer's finances. This thesis may offer a way to possibly bring peace between the opposing parties in the prosperity debate,

Category 1 is the proposed *righteousness* category with tithing as a statement of trust in God's provision for one's needs, and as a commitment to the other aspects of this category, involving financial integrity and honourable financial dealings. This category alone could represent a significant improvement in personal financial arrangements as one makes the commitment to follow God's plan in this important area.

Category 2 offers a further important step by applying God's *wisdom* to one's finances involving saving to provide a surplus, as well as avoiding unplanned expenditure. But, most importantly, at this level, wisdom includes the avoidance of debt, which, according to some prosperity teachers, has caused believers to find themselves trapped, allegedly by the devil. Believers would benefit from living within their means and creating a surplus from which regular charitable donations could be made. This, however, does not reflect the distinctive aspects of Word-faith prosperity

teaching, for the adoption of wisdom accompanied by the renewal of the mind are strategies primarily taught by the non-Word-faith teachers of chapter 6. Nonetheless, together with avoiding debt they form a valuable strategy in personal financial order.

These two categories in financial restoration would perhaps provide a necessary preparation for category 3 of the prosperity strategy, referring to exercising *faith* in God in one's giving for an expected return. This is regarded as faith for increase and thereby faith to be a greater blessing to others and for the furtherance of the gospel. Doubts and uncertainties remain with a number of scholars over the legitimacy of some of these aspects, but the considered application of faith to one's life seems central to Christian lifestyle, including one's financial affairs.

The combined effect of the elements of this categorised prosperity theology would represent a significant improvement in personal financial arrangements, achieved by commitment to God as the source of one's supply, together with the stability produced by introducing financial planning and budgeting. One would also have the opportunity of regulating personal expenditure with the added benefit of resources with which to bless other believers and Christian ministries. As a result, it might reasonably be supposed that God would regard such a person as a worthy recipient of financial blessings through the exercise of their faith.

As a complete financial policy, it is anticipated that every believer could find the category with which they may be comfortable regarding the approaches and courses of action presented, and can reasonably expect greater peace and financial security through adopting such procedures under the Spirit's guidance. Indeed, categories 1 and 2 could reasonably be of wide acceptance, whilst category 3 offers the opportunity to exercise one's faith through generosity. The outcome of this thesis therefore has been the formation of a novel unified prosperity doctrine from the diverse teachings evaluated which might reasonably be regarded as a further step towards an understanding and implementation of Christian prosperity.

(99,897 words)

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